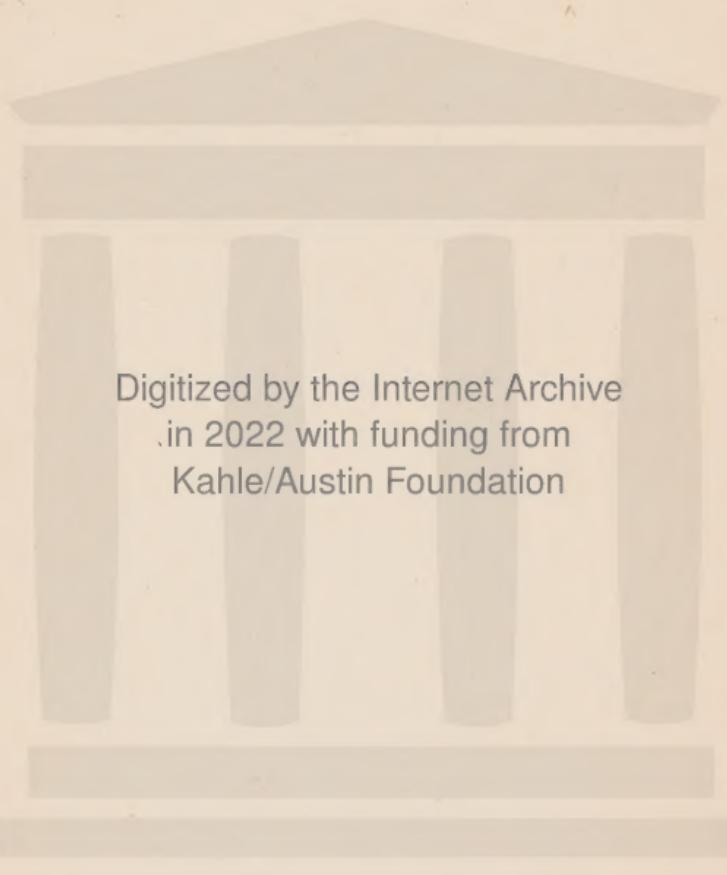


The
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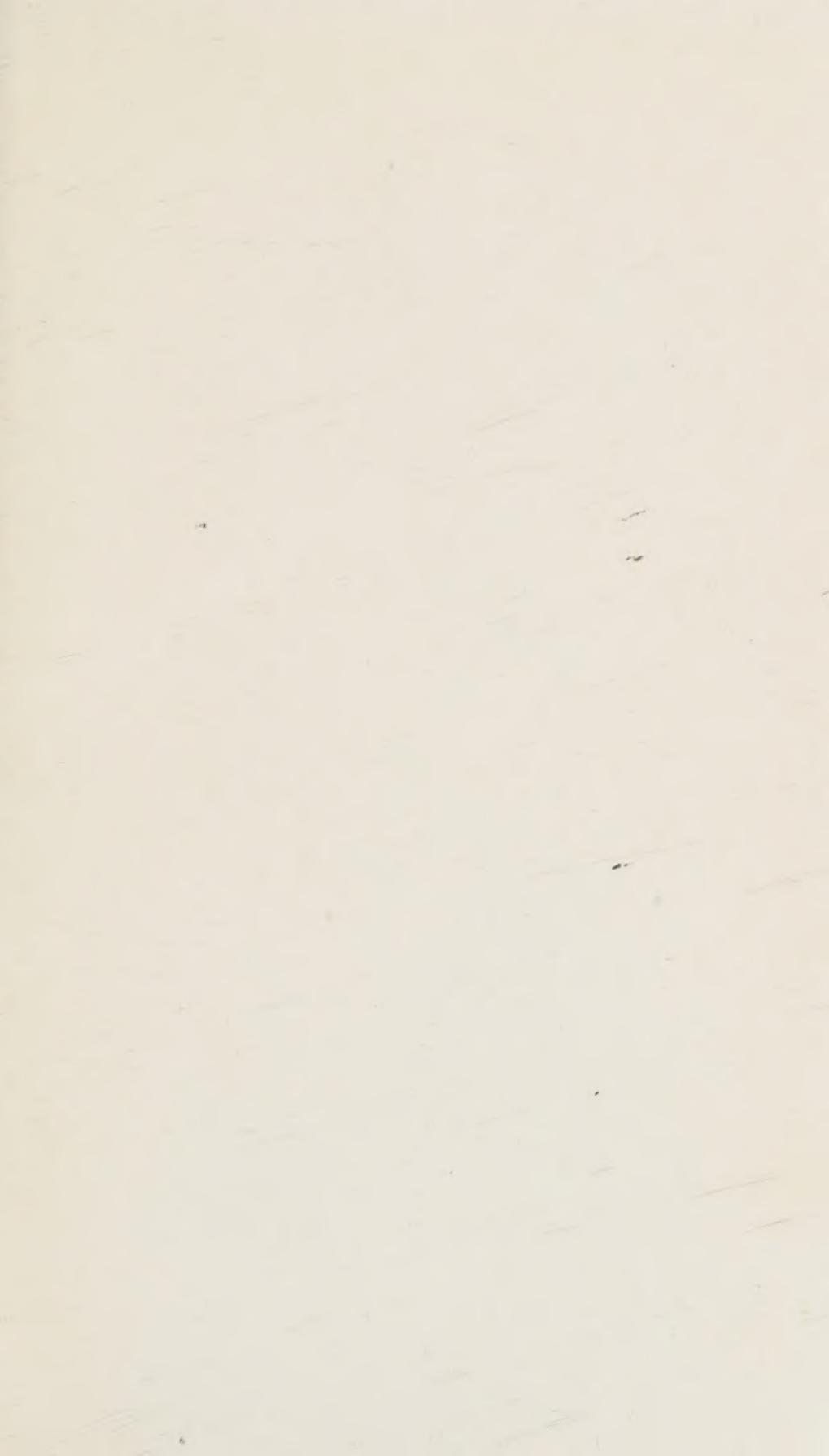
JOHN F. O'NEILL



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The
SACRAMENT
of
FRIENDSHIP







THE LAST VISIT

THE SACRAMENT OF FRIENDSHIP

BY

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AUTHOR OF
THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST
THE COURAGE OF CHRIST
THE CHARITY OF CHRIST
A DIVINE FRIEND



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TO HIS GRACE
THE MOST REVEREND EDMOND F. PRENDERGAST, D.D.
WITH THE HOPE THAT IT MAY ADD TO
THAT INCREASE IN THE DEVOTION OF
THE FAITHFUL TO THE HIDDEN GOD
WHICH HAS EVER BEEN THE PRINCIPAL
PURPOSE AND THE MOST WONDERFUL
FRUIT OF HIS LOVING LABORS AS ARCH-
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PREFACE

“ You are my friends, if you do the things that I command you.” Thus to the apostles and to all mankind, our Lord points out the practical and only adequate way of enjoying in its fulness the blessed privilege of Friendship with Himself.

We are to do what He commands us to do if we would be His friends. If we wish to abide with Him, we ought “ also to walk, even as He walked;” to sacrifice ourselves in obedience to the Divine Will, even as He also sacrificed Himself to the least wish of His Father; to practice the virtues of a true Christian as exemplified in His life; in a word, to strive to be perfect as our “ heavenly Father is perfect.”

Every step, therefore, that we take towards a full reproduction of the virtues of Christ in our lives, every increase in our

Preface

courage and charity, for example, means a firmer and fuller state of friendship with the Great Exemplar of these virtues.

But one barely begins to tread upon the way of the imitation of Christ when he realizes that every step he takes owes its efficacy to the very Model he is striving to imitate, and that all the thoughts and acts that go into the formation of virtue are prompted and sustained by the grace of God given him for this very purpose through the merits of Jesus Christ.

In other words, his Friend is not only his Model, but also his sole support. Without Him he cannot take a step forward. He depends absolutely upon the infinite love of Jesus Christ. There must be a constant outpouring of this love upon him, else he is unable to make the least progress.

It is here that we see clearly the existence of that foundation upon which friendship, in the full sense of the word, is based

Preface

—intercourse between the two terms of the relationship, communication of friend with friend. Our Lord sends us His plenteous love, first to move us to act, and then to perfect the act itself and others that may follow. We, in return, offer Him our efforts of body and mind and will. There is, or should be, on our part, a continuous striving, a constant stream of effort going up to heaven, passing side by side, but in an opposite direction, with the ever-flowing current of divine love that pours downward, tirelessly seeking to penetrate and influence every minutest part of our being.

Upon this intercourse is based our friendship with God, that mutual love of benevolence which leads a Perfect Being to diffuse His infinite goodness upon man, and impels us to add to His external glory by striving to save our own souls and the souls of others in so far as the opportunity is afforded us.

Preface

In the days of the Old Dispensation, God had no permanent abiding place with man, in the sense that He possesses one now. From time to time, He appeared to His creatures under certain visible forms. It was thus that He had converse with Adam and Eve in the Garden, and Moses on Mount Sinai. But these Theophanies, as they are called, were rare. Brief and infrequent, however, as were these and other communications between God and man before the time of our Saviour, they entered into the life of the children of Israel, and helped to supply the stimulus required for the formation of the friendship which then existed between the Creator and His creatures.

Then, in the fulness of time, came the Son of God in the flesh of man, and dwelt amongst us. And His visible habiting in the midst of men gave the most obvious opportunities for the perfecting of friendship with God that the world would ever

Preface

witness. But those who embraced these opportunities were few. And when our Lord ascended into heaven, the vast majority of men had made not the slightest effort to enter into the relationship of friendship with their visible Saviour.

But although the world was thus deprived of the unveiled presence of the Son of God made man, there remains a most wonderful evidence of His love. For He still abides in our midst with the same Flesh and Blood, the same Soul and Body, the same Humanity and Divinity that had ascended into heaven and now sits at the right hand of the Father.

His earthly dwelling place is upon our altars under the humble appearances of bread and wine. Here He lives permanently with the fulness of His Being. Thus it is that we, too, as well as the apostles, have the blessed privilege of possessing the Friend of limitless love and perfect power within easy access and subject to our con-

Preface

stant call. Not in type and figure and in power only, but truly and really and in very Person does Jesus Christ abide with us in the Sacrament of Perfect Friendship—the Holy Eucharist.

PRAYER OF ST. THOMAS:

“ ADORO TE DEVOTE ”

The following Hymn, or Prayer, to the Blessed Sacrament was written by Saint Thomas Aquinas about the year 1260. It has given the inspiration for “ The Sacrament of Friendship,” each chapter of which has been developed from a different part of the Prayer used as a text.

The present work may, therefore, be regarded as a commentary upon the Prayer as a whole. The author has endeavored to make a literal translation into English. In order to accomplish this he has found it advisable to sacrifice rhyme and retain rhythm only.

Adoro te devote, latens Deitas,
Quae sub his figuris vere latitas:
Tibi se cor meum totum subjicit,
Quia te contemplans, totum deficit.

Prayer of St. Thomas

Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur,
Sed auditu solo tuto creditur:
Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius,
Nil hoc verbo Veritatis verius.

In cruce latebat sola Deitas,
At hic latet simul et humanitas:
Ambo tamen credens, atque confitens,
Peto quod petivit latro poenitens.

Plagas, sicut Thomas, non intueor,
Deum tamen meum te confiteor:
Fac me tibi semper magis credere,
In te spem habere, te diligere.

O memoriale mortis Domini,
Panis vivus vitam praestans homini:
Praesta meae menti de te vivere,
Et te illi semper dulce sapere.

Pie pellicane Jesu, Domine,
Me immundum munda tuo sanguine:
Cujus una stilla salvum facere
Totum mundum quit ab omni scelere.

Prayer of St. Thomas

Jesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio,
Oro, fiat illud, quod tam sitio:
Ut te revelata cernens facie,
Visu sim beatus tuae gloriae.

Translation.

Devoutly I adore thee, unseen God,
Truly present 'neath these species hid:
To thee my heart entire subjection
yields,
For thought of thee its total void re-
veals.

Sight and touch and taste have here
no place,
The ear alone guides safely to belief:
My faith is in the word of God's own
Son,
Nothing truer than this word of
Truth.

Prayer of St. Thomas

Only the Godhead on the cross was
hidden,
Here the manhood also lies concealed:
But still believing both, and both con-
fessing,
Seek I the boon that sought the thief
repenting.

Not like Thomas, do I see the wounds,
But still do I declare: Thou art my
God.

Grant to my belief and hope in thee,
And to my love for thee, a constant
growth.

O memorial of the Master's death,
Living bread that givest life to man:
Grant my soul the grace to live in
thee,
And ever have thy sweetness for its
own.

Prayer of St. Thomas

O loving pelican, O Jesu, Lord,
Cleanse thy unclean servant with thy
blood:
Of which a single drop hath strength
to save
From all its wickedness the entire
world.

Jesu, who now art hidden from my
sight,
Grant what I so dearly do desire:
That contemplating thee, thy face un-
veiled,
My bliss may be thy glory to behold.

THE SACRAMENT OF FRIENDSHIP

CHAPTER I

ACTS OF ADORATION

Adoro te devote, latens Deitas,
Quae sub his figuris vere latitas.

Devoutly I adore Thee, unseen God,
Truly present 'neath these species hid.

To recognize our own insufficiency, our need of help from others in some form or other, does not of necessity imply either cowardice or lack of energy and initiative on our part. The most masterful of men must, at some time in their lives, feel the force of this truth. The universal craving for friendship is in itself one of the most conclusive proofs that man depends upon his fellow-man for help of some kind, whether it be sympathy and love, or

Acts of Adoration

purely material assistance. He seeks this help, consciously or unconsciously, in every friendship that he forms: the need of it is emphasized in every ideal and every ambition that enter into his life.

If he be avowedly or practically an unbeliever, he searches for and leans upon the insufficient help that human beings can give. If he be a true Christian, he uses not alone this God-given natural help, but reaches out beyond it to God Himself. Sometimes he goes to his great Friend before the failure of natural aid forces him; at other times it is only when he has sounded to their depths the reservoirs of man's limited powers that he turns to the inexhaustible fount of Divine Friendship. In either of these latter cases there is the recognition, expressed or implied, of his own essential helplessness and of his Maker's all-sufficient power and love.

How helpful it would be for us if this recognition existed in its fulness at every

The Sacrament of Friendship

period of our lives. How wonderful would be the transformation effected in our ideals, our aspirations and our conduct, if the acknowledgment of God's goodness would form the fundamental principle guiding us, and giving vitality to all that we say or do or think.

It is true that, whenever the fact of our dependence upon God is brought home to us, we do very readily acknowledge it. But it is equally true that, unless we frequently advert to this complete dependence of ours upon our Maker, we are most likely to live, in a more or less marked degree, as if we were in reality independent beings.

For a person who, while he believes in God, has no special form of religious belief, who professes to serve God "in spirit and in truth," and in on other way, it is most difficult, practically impossible in fact, to live in constant, close and conscious relationship with God. Man, com-

Acts of Adoration

posed as he is of the material element as well as the spiritual, cannot keep in intimate contact with a purely spiritual being, unless he have help from above. For this reason, at divers times under the Old Dispensation, God communicated with His creatures, either immediately under visible forms, or through the agency of men and angels. But there was no permanent, visible presence of the Godhead.

With the advent of the New Dispensation, the manifestations of God's love for man reached their climax. The method of communication between Creator and creature was now to attain its perfection. The Son of God took upon Himself our flesh and blood, came as a man into the midst of men, and from that time on—from the Incarnation until the end of the world—has chosen to dwell with men. For the first thirty-three years this presence was unveiled; from the time of the Ascension it has been hidden, but none the less

The Sacrament of Friendship

real. Every one of a million and more sanctuary lamps points to the real presence of Jesus Christ, God and Man.

In this there is something that we can understand, inscrutable Mystery that it is. Not the mode of the Divine Presence, not the miracles involved in the accomplishment of the Fact of this Presence, but the Presence Itself—this we can understand. For each one of us knows, ah, how well! the necessity, the unspeakable advantage of having Jesus Christ, our Perfect Friend, near at hand, constantly and easily accessible.

Given a right appreciation of God's love, and the authoritative statement that the God-Man is with us in our churches, and the rest is easy. Then, spontaneously, we feel that, astonishing as this truth is, it is only what we should expect from the great love of the Heart of Jesus.

The white Host held up for adoration during Benediction is Something that we

Acts of Adoration

can see with our bodily eyes, while the eyes of the soul pierce the veil and look on the Divinity beneath the appearance of bread. In spite of all the weakness and inadequacy of sense perception, having once bent the intellect beneath the words of Christ Himself: “This is my Body,” we can and do rest happy in the consciousness that God is with us, not alone in his power and sustaining force, not alone in His Divine Personality, but as Man also.

Thus the chasm between the spiritual and the material, between the infinite and the finite, between time and eternity, is bridged over. And the bridge is open to us. We have but to visit the nearest Catholic church, and lo! we have crossed the chasm. There is conscious contact with our God. The expression “man kneeling before God,” in its commonly accepted sense, is too broad and general to describe this unique fact. Such an act of homage can be performed at any place, for God is

The Sacrament of Friendship

everywhere. But now it is man kneeling before One who is also Man as well as God, One whose Body is here with a human Soul that holds memory and intelligence and will, One who sees us and knows us with His human vision and understanding, One of our own kind who is both Son of God and Child of Mary—Jesus Christ, our Brother and our Saviour.

Under these conditions it is so much easier to talk to God! We know, of course, that He always understands us, but here we can very readily feel this truth. Gazing upon the tabernacle, or upon the Host publicly exposed for worship, we poor, helpless sinners can easily make the act of adoration His presence demands.

The performance of this act of adoration is the very first duty imposed upon us in the august presence of the Godhead. He is, indeed, our Friend, but the necessity that rests upon us of acknowledging His perfection and our emptiness is not

Acts of Adoration

at all inconsistent with a state of friendship. We want to lean upon some one. We feel that, after all, it is only with one who is adorable that we are able to enjoy that perfect familiarity which characterizes the highest form of friendship. It is not to every friend that we tell our faults and our failures. It is not to every friend that we reveal our natural weaknesses. One must be a very close friend indeed whom we could thus implicitly acknowledge to be better than we are. And yet, we do want to confide in some one. We want to bare our hearts, to lay open the secrets of our souls to one whom we can trust, to one who will understand us and be able to help us.

The strongest man and the most self-sufficient, unless he be influenced unduly by pride, is willing to admit, if he searches his soul, that he feels the need of looking up to some one as stronger and better than himself. Here is the element of adoration

The Sacrament of Friendship

that is implanted in man's soul. And the only one who is the adequate object of this feeling is God Himself. A perfect Friend alone is worthy of the perfect gift of a friend—adoration.

But this adoration must be complete. We must fearlessly face all that real adoration implies. There must be no drawing back, but a generous compliance with every demand that springs inexorably from the fundamental reason for adoration—that God is our Creator, Preserver and Redeemer; that we owe all to Him; and that without Him, therefore, we are nothing.

This means that our adoration must be "devout," that we give ourselves unreservedly to our Master, that we strive to put aside during our adoration all our longing for created things. It means that, when we pay our homage to our Maker, we must do our utmost to sink the sorrow of our hearts deep down into the love inspired by the presence of the great Con-

Acts of Adoration

soler, that we must allow our anxious fear for the future to be absorbed by the confidence created within us by Him who holds our destinies in the hollow of His hand. Only a complete surrender of all our interests will make possible for us the performance of an act of adoration, perfect so far as our limited powers permit it to be.

Adoration is an act of fealty to our Divine King. We kneel before Him and declare that we are His subjects, His vassals, His men. We protest that we are ready to do or die for Him. How hollow would be these words, how hypocritical would be our solemn protest of loyalty and complete subjection, if we allowed a love for the things that God forbids to exist at the same time in our hearts, or if even our legitimate plans and aspirations for this life were consciously and deliberately permitted to distract us!

Of course, it is hard, practically impossible for the most part, to make an act of

The Sacrament of Friendship

adoration without any distraction, without some misgivings for the future, without some sorrow springing from the present or the past. But God makes allowance for this, and accepts as complete what is really incomplete, but through no lack of effort on our part.

It is possible, however, to perfect our adoration by frequent repetition, by careful and persevering effort to keep our minds fixed upon the one dominant thought of God's absolute dominion over us. We can, of course, do this elsewhere than in the church, but undoubtedly the best place to perfect our acts of adoration is in the presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

For this reason, if for no other, every sincere Catholic will try to make frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Naturally, after the reception of our Lord in Holy Communion, this is the first and most important duty that arises from the fact

Acts of Adoration

of the Real Presence. Surely, other things being equal, those who visit our Lord are more likely to obtain help than those who reject opportunities of speaking to Him in the church, and prefer to present their homage to Him in their own homes.

What would have been the joy of David, how sublime would have been the outpouring of that joy, had the God of Hosts Himself been present in the Tabernacle of Israel as He is present in our Tabernacles to-day! David, without the Real Presence, is moved “to go over into the place of the wonderful tabernacle,” is inspired by the thought of this to the highest flights of poetic fancy, is filled with inexpressible yearning for the “courts of the Lord.” We, with Christ present in our midst, of easy access at all times, remain, as a rule, cold and indifferent, experience seldom if ever the raptures of David, and rarely think of visiting that same Lord who dwells

The Sacrament of Friendship

in our churches just as truly and really as in the courts of the heavenly Jerusalem.

And the One whom we refuse to visit is our Friend, our best, our perfect Friend. He claims our allegiance, and in return gives us the love and protection of a God. We accept the love, and profit daily by the protection that He gives, but, for the most part, neglect to make anything like a due return. Every failure to embrace a good opportunity of visiting the "heavenly court" for the purpose of protesting our loyalty and offering our adoration, means the loss of an appreciable gift of spiritual progress. A total neglect of visiting the Blessed Sacrament to ask for help and to receive it, is almost unintelligible. It certainly is an evidence of utter folly.

The Blessed Sacrament is our greatest treasure. To use the words of Father Faber: "It is no less than heaven on earth * * * God has thrown Himself, His grace, His joy, His presence into it as the last

Acts of Adoration

citadel of His love.” And this priceless treasure is without limits, ever-present and immeasurable. Created riches, no matter how magnificently generous God has been in their bestowal, can be exhausted; but the uncreated treasure of the tabernacle is inexhaustible, lasting for all time and for eternity, containing help and comfort indescribably greater than could possibly be needed by all the sons and daughters of Adam. Untold thousands have drawn from this fountain of sweet, saving water; and still there is no diminution of its content.

As for the future, no matter how many generations still unborn shall go to it in their need, in their sorrow and suffering, still shall the waters of everlasting life rise to the parched lips and bathe with endless flow the fainting soul that seeks for it as the “ hart panteth after the fountains of water.”

If we only knew the depths of the riches

The Sacrament of Friendship

and graces that rest in the tabernacle; if we only realized the intense desire Jesus has to help us, we would spend much more of our time before the altar. In the words of the Psalmist, we would "go over into the place of the wonderful tabernacle, even to the House of God: with the voice of joy and praise."

Some may say that they feel no fervor in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, that their minds wander, and worldly thoughts crowd out all higher aspirations. Yes, this may be true, but the very fact that they come to church and try to pray is more pleasing to Jesus than they can possibly imagine. If the thoughts persist in wandering, it would be well to take a book along and read some of the beautiful prayers that have been written especially for visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

Then, if it is God's will, we shall leave the church feeling the spiritual peace and joy that the Lord alone can give. And

Acts of Adoration

even if this feeling is absent, still we shall have gained graces that will come to our assistance later when we sorely need them. Many a trial bravely borne, many an act of sacrifice unselfishly offered, many a temptation nobly resisted, have been made possible because of five or ten minutes spent in adoration before the tabernacle, possibly months or years before.

These precious moments spent in the presence of our Lord will be a faint foretaste of heaven, where the adoration, thanksgiving and supplication we now offer to the Divine Friend hidden from bodily vision will be changed to an unending hymn of praise and glory rising exultantly to this same Friend sitting revealed in all His power and beauty and love at the right hand of God the Father for ages and ages without end.

CHAPTER II

SIGNS AND SAFEGUARDS OF ADORATION

Tibi se cor meum totum subjicit,
Quia te contemplans, totum deficit.

To Thce my heart entire subjection yields,
For thought of Thee its total void reveals.

We can easily understand that adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is the first and most important obligation imposed upon us by the fact of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ upon our altars. This obligation arises naturally from our relation of absolute dependence upon Almighty God. But even if this were not the case, even if we were not obliged to pay formal and complete homage to our Maker, we would be acting the part of perfect wisdom, and working for our very highest good, by giving our adoration to God as a labor

Signs and Safeguards

of self-love. In other words, if God did not command us to adore Him, if He had not said: "Thou shalt adore the Lord thy God," if He had left the performance of acts of adoration to our own pleasure—assuming the possibility of such a state—even then sensible men would of their own accord offer Him formal recognition of His infinite superiority.

For He would still be the Source of all grace and all help; and this help would still be given to us in answer to our prayers, and in proportion to the humility, fervor, confidence and perseverance characterizing these prayers. It is easy to see that these essential qualities, as well as the very purpose and scope of our prayers, would spring from, and be shaped by, a knowledge of our own needs and God's power and willingness to supply these needs. And no act reveals to man his needs, his poverty and weakness so clearly and so completely as that contemplation of

The Sacrament of Friendship

Divine greatness and goodness which is essentially implied in adoration.

By contrast, the fact of our utter insignificance begins to impress itself upon us all the more vividly as we reflect upon God's dominion over us. We see more clearly His power and beauty and love as we center our thoughts upon Him. We are then instinctively led to turn the mind's eye from Him to ourselves. Our daily experience of our pitiful deficiencies comes clearly before us. Placed side by side with the tremendous but tranquil Life of God, with its unlimited possibilities continually unfolding before us, our own existence gradually assumes its true proportions, fading into nothingness when we seek, with our imagination, to view it outside the sphere of God's influence. In the depths of our souls we feel as the Psalmist did, and with him we cry out: "But I am needy and poor; O God help me."

"Needy and poor." Yes, with an ab-

Signs and Safeguards

solute poverty, with an imperative need. The most miserable beggar on earth could not, with the same implied meaning, speak thus of his earthly poverty. For even if he be stripped of all possessions in the material order, even if he be without a friend and homeless, still would he possess life and liberty and the right to those things that are necessary for the preservation of life and liberty. In the eyes of men, viewing these things from a purely natural standpoint, there are certain rights which even the pauper possesses, rights which are not dependent upon his fellow-men. In the sight of God, however, even these common possessions of humanity are seen to be rooted in the Divinity and to have no value save that which has sprung from, and depends upon, the beneficent goodness of the Creator.

Every time we come into the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, we should make this act of adoration, this acknowledgment

The Sacrament of Friendship

of God's infinite superiority, and of our own nothingness without Him. It does not have to be a set formula of words. Let it be whatever comes easiest to us at the time: formal, vocal prayer; impromptu talk; or a purely mental act. The essential thing is an acknowledgment that springs from, and is accompanied by, a sense of our own unworthiness.

We are in the presence of God. There are two beings in the church, only two so far as concerns our present purpose—God and myself. And God is here not only as God, but as Man also. Therefore, two human beings are within a few feet of each other. I know some things about the Manhood of Jesus Christ. I know that He lived on earth and was subject to heat and cold and hunger and fatigue very much as I am now. As a Man, whenever He acted, He did noble things most nobly, or performed the humbler deeds with all the perfection proper to them; whenever He

Signs and Safeguards

spoke, He spoke words of wisdom. All this compels my respect, my admiration and my love.

But He is God, too. The Person into whose presence I have come is a Divine Person, with a Divine Nature besides His Human Nature. He whom I readily acknowledge as superior to me in all the phases of His Humanity, is not only superior, but Supreme, since He is God. And my deep reverence and admiration and love for the perfect Man find themselves to be in reality only phases of the habit of adoration that is seated in my soul and manifests itself in various manners and at various times.

My reverence and love for Jesus Christ as Man are, therefore, as far from my reverence and love for merely human beings as heaven is from earth. For the objects are infinitely distant from each other, being on the one hand the uncreated

The Sacrament of Friendship

Son of God made Man, and on the other the created children of Adam.

I see now that the virtues of the Man Jesus are rooted in, and inseparable from, the immeasurable depths of God's goodness. I see that the power of Christ, so wonderfully restrained during His life on earth, is simply beyond conception since it, too, is united with the Godhead and can draw at will from fathomless depths of Divine Omnipotence.

Thinking over the various words and acts of Jesus on earth, I trace them to their ultimate root in the essence of God Himself. From the beauty of the human word or act, and from my faith that there exists, outside the sphere of my present vision, a Divine beauty infinite in its essence and, therefore, hopelessly beyond the reach of human expression, I can put together in my mind some idea of what is hidden before me behind the tabernacle door. With ideas such as these I contrast my own

Signs and Safeguards

miserable attempts at goodness, and again and again I cry out with David: “Look thou upon me, and have mercy on me: for I am alone and poor.”

It is most fitting that this interior spirit of lowliness and reverent awe should show itself in our outward manner while we are in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. The rubrics of the church and the customs of the faithful have provided various means of showing this reverence. Bending the knee on entering or leaving the church, a double genuflection when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, no unnecessary talking, a quiet manner of moving about within the church, lifting the hat when passing the church door—all these are simply so many ways of giving expression to the interior adoration that fills our souls.

And this outward expression of reverence, when properly understood, does not in any way destroy, or tend to destroy, that relationship of friendship which exists

The Sacrament of Friendship

between Christ and a true Christian. Friendship is a mutual love of benevolence based upon some form or forms of communication between friends. These communications need not be physical; the spiritual intercourse between God and ourselves is the highest permanent form. But the physical form is also good. And a goodly part of our share in this consists in the various acts mentioned above.

Certainly in every state of friendship, the external forms of communication should be consistent with the dignity of the persons concerned. No true friend would refuse to recognize a real difference in dignity between himself and his friend. On the contrary, he would naturally take delight in, and be proud of, the exalted state of his friend, and would seek to show his interior recognition of it in some fitting external manner.

Take, for example, the question of keeping silence in church. When we are in the

Signs and Safeguards

church we are visiting a Friend; we are in His Presence. He sees us and wishes to talk to us, wishes us to listen to Him and to speak to Him. Would any one of us, while on a visit to an earthly friend and engaged in conversation with him, abruptly turn aside to speak to another who could in no sense be so important to us as the one whose home we have entered and whose attention is being given to us in the kindest and most considerate manner?

It is said that familiarity breeds contempt. God forbid that this should be the case with man in his relations with God! But there is a very real danger of this truth being verified in the most exalted of all the relations that man can enter into. Let it be borne constantly in mind that familiarity is not friendship, and that familiarity, when pushed to extremes, has destroyed more friendships than most other causes put together. In a good and restricted sense, it accompanies friend-

The Sacrament of Friendship

ship, and is one of its most delightful qualities. But only in a restricted sense. Let the bounds of propriety be broken down, let conventions be put aside, let men refuse to give to their friends those ordinary courtesies and marks of politeness that are characteristic of true culture—and no state of friendship will last very long.

This is strikingly true of our relations with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Were we to give Him no external evidence of respect, were we to refuse Him what corresponds to those ordinary civilities that we give to friends of infinitely lesser worth, very surely and very quickly our interior dispositions towards Him would undergo a change, our affection for Him and our loving trust in Him would diminish in intensity and eventually disappear almost, if not quite, completely.

One of the best safeguards of the state of friendship between our Lord and our-

Signs and Safeguards

selves, as well as of the underlying habit of adoration, is that system of outward marks of respect and devotion which deals with, and helps very decidedly, to direct our intercourse with our Friend in the tabernacle.

And notice how this obligation of showing outward signs of respect is imposed upon us. Not as an autocrat does our Lord command our obeisance. Not as a tyrant who jealously seeks for, and vindictively punishes, the least infringement of a rigid set of rules established to regulate the conduct of subjects in the presence of Majesty. No, His laws are imposed and enforced with all the kindness and considerateness of true friendship.

If they are not observed, there is no question of speedy and dire punishment to be inflicted by an angry and vengeful king. Punishment, it is true, does follow a non-observance of the respect due to the Real

The Sacrament of Friendship

Presence of God's Son in the Blessed Sacrament. But the punishment is a logical one, rising inevitably from the very nature of the offence. It is the culprit who punishes himself by weakening the bonds of friendship and withdrawing himself from the benevolent influence of his Friend.

If we grow lax in our outward reverence, we grow correspondingly careless in our appreciation of the Object of this reverence. We do not love Him so much as we formerly did, and we gradually cease to be friends, and become more and more merely subjects, of the King of Kings. Our relationship of dependence we cannot destroy; that of friendship, since friendship depends upon free will, we can, and unfortunately often do, either destroy or weaken very perceptibly.

And see how this Regal Friend, whose power is absolute and whose dignity essentially demands our respect, humbles Himself in our presence! If He does request

Signs and Safeguards

outward as well as inward adoration on our part, see in what a guise He clothes His Majesty! See how completely He hides the awful splendor of His Godhead! See how considerate He is of our weakness, how willing He is to forego, when circumstances would make it hard for us to give them, even those few external marks of respect ordinarily offered to Him!

Naturally a kneeling posture in His Presence is the normal one. But with the true thoughtfulness and consideration of a Friend, He gently urges us to seek a more comfortable position when we are physically weary. He is willing to give up His right to this mark of reverence from us, and to hear and talk to us just as lovingly when we stand or sit as when we kneel. And if we give but a few minutes to a visit, even though we could easily stay longer with Him, He is not offended,

The Sacrament of Friendship

but graciously accepts our effort and generously rewards it.

How can we help resolving to be more faithful to so considerate a Friend? Who would grudge Him the few marks of respect He asks of us? Surely no true Catholic, were he calmly to reflect upon his obligation, would fail to make a strong resolution to observe all the proprieties that the Divinity of our Friend necessitates. Meditation upon the infinite distance in dignity between ourselves and our Lord will help us keep this resolution. It will also, as we have seen, help us to pray oftener and more fervently and more humbly. For it points out to us ever more and more clearly the immeasurable power and inexhaustible willingness of God to help us, and our own absolute subjection to this power and our constant need of its exercise on our behalf.

And even though the soul is filled by this contemplation of God's greatness

Signs and Safeguards

with so overwhelming a sense of its own nothingness that it must needs faint away, it is only to find itself immediately coming to life again in the strong arms of its Lord and Master whose support it now seeks with a confidence borne of experience, and a love purer and more powerful by reason of closer contact with the very Source of Love and Strength.

CHAPTER III

MOTIVE OF FAITH IN THE REAL PRESENCE

Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur,
Sed auditu solo tuto creditur:
Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius,
Nil hoc verbo Veritatis verius.

Sight and touch and taste have here no place,
The ear alone guides safely to belief:
My faith is in the word of God's own Son,
Nothing truer than this word of Truth.

The Body of our Blessed Lord is obviously not present in the Blessed Eucharist in the same manner in which our bodies are present in any given space. The mode of His existence in the Host is supernatural, that is, above the natural. It is, therefore, not at all strange that the ordinary powers of perceiving the presence of human bodies are in this instance incapable of performing their functions. What Catholic Philosophers call "extension"

Motive of Faith

has by a miracle been removed from our Lord's Body, thus leaving it substantially present, but beyond the perception of the senses.

Thus, although we really see our Lord present in the Blessed Sacrament, we do not see Him with the eyes of the body, but with those of the intellect. Nor can the mental vision pierce unaided the veil of the Host, but must needs be raised to the supernatural order by the gift of sanctifying grace accompanied by the virtue of faith, which renders the mind capable of grasping the fact of the Real Presence when this fact is properly presented to us.

This is the reason, then, why St. Thomas tells us that "the ear alone guides safely to belief." For our knowledge of this great Mystery comes from revelation, from the presentation of the word of God. This was just as true of the first believers in the Blessed Sacrament as it is of ourselves. When our Lord, at the Last Supper, spoke

The Sacrament of Friendship

the words: “ This is my body,” the apostles present saw but the appearances of bread: when they received their first Holy Communion from the hands of the Son of God, their lips touched and tasted what seemed to be bread similar to that which they had eaten often before at the Feast of the Passover. Thus, had they followed only the guidance of sight and touch and taste, they would have had no knowledge of humanity’s greatest boon. But on their ears had fallen the few words of Consecration uttered by the great High Priest, and, enlightened by the gift of faith, they interpreted rightly the idea entering into their intellects through the sense of hearing.

And so it is the intellect alone that can truly be said to pierce the veil and see the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ beneath the sacramental species. Forewarned by faith, it puts aside the service of sight and touch and taste, a service that is still loyal and truthful, for these senses

Motive of Faith

report what is really before them, that is, the appearances of bread. They are simply unequal, however, to the task of telling us what substance lies beneath these accidents. They were never intended to grasp any objects save those falling within the limited sphere of their activity. They tell the mind that there is something before them that is round and white, with the taste of bread, and the weight and quality of it. Then their task is finished. It is the intellect that knows how to measure the validity of their testimony and to discern the presence of the Body and Blood of a Divine and Human Being miraculously taking the place of the substance of bread that had been present up to the time of the Consecration.

And our reason for believing this astounding fact is the testimony of God Himself. Even if there were a fundamental opposition between the testimony of our senses and that of God, there could be

The Sacrament of Friendship

no room for doubt as to which of the two we should prefer. But, as we have just seen, the opposition is merely apparent. The knowledge that comes from God directly is certainly the last word on the question, the ultimate source of belief. We cannot go beyond this, nor contrary to it.

And God has spoken. No divine pronouncement is given more clearly or more compactly. He who is Truth itself, on the night before He suffered and died, has given us in the solemnity of the Upper Chamber, the first Tabernacle of the Blessed Sacrament, unquestionable proof of the Real Presence. No less than four trustworthy men, two of them eye-witnesses, and the other two contemporaries, give us accounts of the Institution of the Holy Eucharist. We shall quote the words of St. Mark: "And while they were eating, Jesus took bread: and blessing broke, and gave to them, and said: Take ye, This is my body. And having taken the

Motive of Faith

chalice, giving thanks he gave it to them. And they all drank of it. And he said to them: This is my blood of the new testament, which shall be shed for many."

Add to this the command reported by St. Luke and St. Paul in their narratives: "Do this for a commemoration of Me," and you have testimony in favor of the fact of Christ's Real Presence of so clear and convincing a nature that no judge or jury would dare reject it. The credibility of Christ is beyond question. The words themselves have an obvious meaning and admit of no other interpretation unless violence be done to them. The narratives of the New Testament are authentic and genuine; even in non-Catholic versions the presence of these passages still persists. A vast array of sermons, commentaries, etc., and the practical faith of all Catholics from Apostolic times to the present day give overwhelming proof that the faithful have unhesitatingly adhered to the evident

The Sacrament of Friendship

meaning of the New Testament accounts of the Institution.

Let us take but two of the earliest proofs from Tradition. St. Ignatius of Antioch, who was a disciple of the apostles and suffered martyrdom in year 107, writes thus concerning a certain heretical sect: “They abstain from the Holy Eucharist * * * because they do not confess with us that the Blessed Sacrament is our Saviour’s true flesh, which suffered for our sins and was raised to life again by the Father.” Justin Martyr, who was put to death about the year 165, gives us this clear evidence of the prevalent and very active belief among the Christians of his time: “We do not receive these gifts (Holy Communion at that time was received under both forms) as ordinary food and common drink, but just as it is of faith that Jesus Christ our Saviour became man, and for our redemption took upon Himself flesh and blood, so that it has been strenuously

Motive of Faith

inculcated upon us that the food which has been blessed with words is the Flesh and Blood of this same Jesus, the incarnate Son of God."

It seems incredible that any Christians, believing in the New Testament, and accepting as parts of it the narratives of the Institution, can fail to grasp the plain meaning of the words: "This is my body; This is my blood." When the former words were spoken, we are clearly told that Christ had taken bread into His hands; when He spoke the words over the chalice, He held the chalice in His hands. Indeed, in this latter case, the word "this" is connected with "chalice," for St. Paul says "this chalice," and St. Luke, "This is the chalice."

We know from our experience with those non-Catholics who really recognize the fact that we believe in the Real Presence, that our amazement at their lack of discernment has its counterpart in the surprise,

The Sacrament of Friendship

or contempt or pity as it may be, aroused in them by our apparent folly in accepting the words of Christ in their literal, instead of their figurative, sense. A detailed answer to this objection would take up too much space and is unnecessary here. Scores of Catechisms, Manuals of Theology and Scriptural Commentaries have lucidly and sufficiently vindicated the Catholic position and destroyed every argument advanced in favor of a figurative interpretation.

For the purpose of private devotion, we do not need a discussion of this nature, but it will perhaps be helpful to us if we discover the fundamental reason that has moved many non-Catholics—whether they are conscious of it or not—to twist the words of our Lord from a literal to a figurative meaning. This reason has been, and is to-day, a lack of supernatural vision. The scope and keenness of their mental eye have been contracted and dulled by

Motive of Faith

the weakening of faith consequent upon various causes, principally a loss of humility.

With them the words of St. Thomas are reversed. With them "sight and touch and taste" occupy the first and only place. "The ear alone" is an untrustworthy guide. The idea first conveyed to their minds by the words of Christ: "This is my body; This is my blood," is at once rejected. Why? Because sight and touch and taste tell them, as they think, that it is not Christ's body and blood. The evidence of their senses is against the word of God.

The intellectual attitude of the world outside the pale of true Christianity is to a great extent an attitude of materialism. For men of this kind there is no Blessed Sacrament because there is no supernatural vision. They have intellectual vision, it is true, but only in a natural state. What they perceive in the Blessed Sacra-

The Sacrament of Friendship

ment is something that, if it were chemically analyzed, would prove to have all the characteristics of bread. "Therefore," they say, "it is bread and nothing else."

But Christ says it is His Body. Now, the majority of men to-day do not care what our Lord says, but there still are quite a few outside the Church for whom this disagreement is a source of perplexity, possibly of worry. A reconciliation must be brought about. And so they say, as the easiest way out of it, that Christ did not mean just what He said, but was speaking in a figurative sense and meant: "This bread is like my body because it nourishes your bodies as I nourish your souls by giving you my grace when you associate yourselves with me and thus receive me by faith."

How easy it would be, how much more consoling and helpful and meritorious, if those who invent this blind-alley method of escaping a difficulty would only heed

Motive of Faith

the call of faith, give up the created guidance given by the senses, and follow the uncreated Light of Life leading them to seek the simple solution of their problem in the immeasurable power and love of Almighty God.

All who really believe in our Blessed Lord, whether they be Catholic or Protestant—and quite a few of the latter still hold to the Divinity of Christ—will readily admit that God's love for us is not to be measured by human methods, and that there are possibilities in that love which are endless and beyond the wildest flights of the imagination.

Let a candid non-Catholic thus question himself: Would I like to have Christ as my Friend, always accessible? Would I like to feel and know that I could go to His home for a visit whenever I wished, and always find Him present with just the same mind and heart and body that He possessed when He sat as a Friend in the

The Sacrament of Friendship

house of Mary and Martha at Bethany? Do I believe that His love for us is so great that He would create so ideal a condition if He could? And from the heart of a true lover of Christ comes at once the answer—Yes.

Well, then, the next question is: Can He do all this? But we know that to God all things are possible. Why hesitate to believe that the eternal Son of God, a pure and most powerful Spirit, who came from heaven and clothed Himself in human flesh, has not the power to perpetuate this presence under a still more humble form? We dare not deny the power; and the exercise of it involves no inconsistency on God's part.

Then the last question: His love would prompt Him to do it; His power would enable Him to do it—has He actually done it? And we see the answer in the pages of Holy Writ. We hear the answer brought to us in the words and life of a

Motive of Faith

million times a million children of the Church, not deluded fanatics, but human beings of the same intellectual power and the same common sense as their fellow-men, many of them leaders in the thought and action of their times.

And this answer, written in the Book of Books and brought down to us on the continuous current of the most perfect human love and the most self-sacrificing human devotion, is given every day before the altars of the Most High God by numberless priests of the New Law who bow in expectant reverence before common bread and wine, and say the self-same words of their Master: “This is my body; This is my blood.” And lo! the Perfect Friend has again changed bread and wine into His Body and Blood, as He did in the upper chamber on the eve of His passion and death.

And let us bear in mind that this belief is not founded on the interpretation and

The Sacrament of Friendship

teaching of man. Those who believe in the Blessed Sacrament are not, as many outsiders say, led blindly by clever leaders who skilfully play upon the emotions, upon fear and affection, and who are especially desirous of bending the flexible, unsophisticated mind and heart of the child towards a devotion that, as scoffers hold, would be surely and persistently rejected by the impartial and unfettered mind of an adult.

It is true that the Church has spoken and defined the doctrine, but the devout Catholic possesses in this matter the faith of those Christians who lived before the definitions of Councils, and does not need the direction of an infallible guide to stimulate and strengthen his belief in the Blessed Sacrament. The words of His Saviour are plain enough. And every man who believes that Jesus Christ is God, who respects the New Testament as the word of God, and who in a manly manner recog-

Motive of Faith

nizes God's power and love, and his own failings and necessities, will without hesitation build up an unquestioning faith in the Real Presence, using as his foundation the clear words of Christ, and saying reverently, with St. Thomas:

“ My faith is in the word of God’s own Son,
Nothing truer than this word of Truth.”

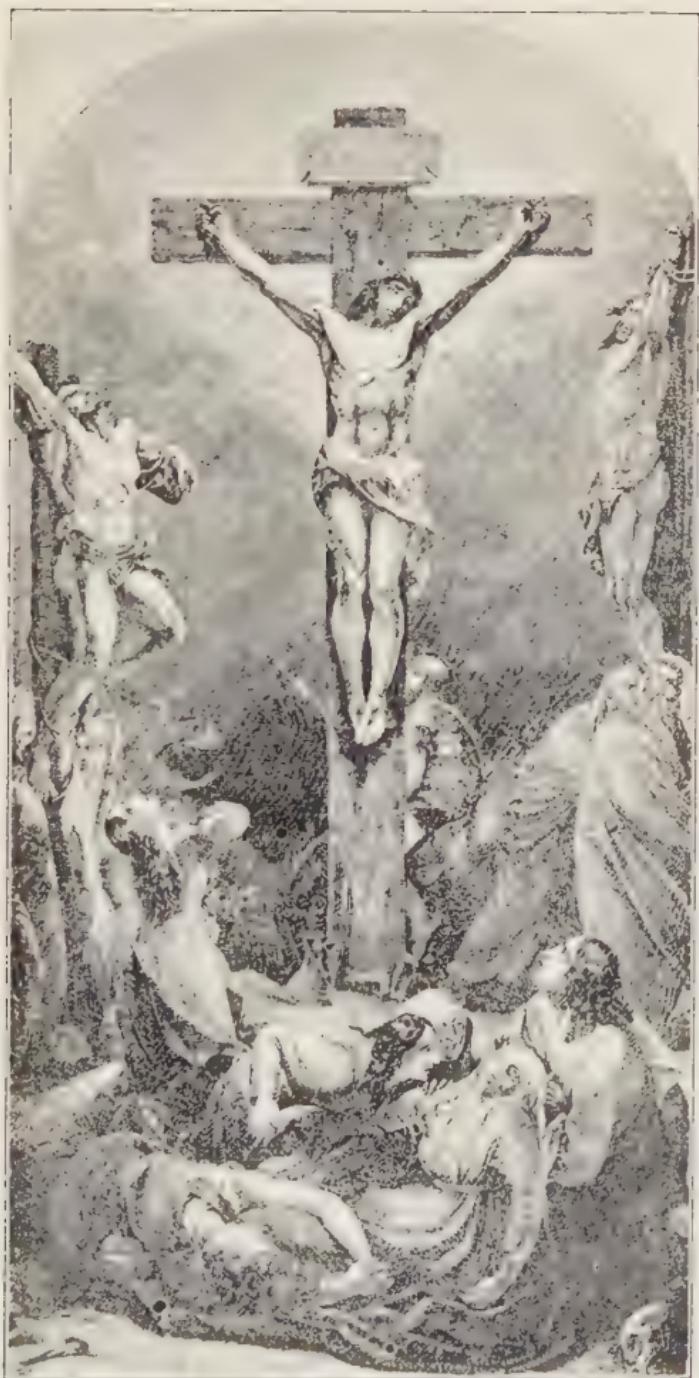
CHAPTER IV

THE OBJECT OF OUR FAITH

In cruce latebat sola Deitas,
At hic latet simul et humanitas:
Ambo tamen credens, atque confitens,
Peto quod petivit latro poenitens.

Only the Godhead on the cross was hidden,
Here the manhood also lies concealed:
But still believing both, and both confessing,
Seek I the boon that sought the thief repenting.

The love of God for man as shown in the Incarnation stands forth most vividly when we consider the wonderful act of self-abasement it involved. Speak to one who has no knowledge of this great Mystery of the New Law; tell him that God the Son, a pure Spirit, eternal and all-powerful, descended from heaven, took upon Himself human flesh and appeared as true man in the midst of men—and he would exclaim, unless he were enlightened by



THE REPENTENT THIEF

Object of our Faith

faith: “ Surely such an act is unthinkable; it would be too degrading. The distance in dignity between Creator and creature precludes the possibility of such self-abasement.” And from the purely natural standpoint he would seem to be right.

Then, take such a one in spirit to the foot of Calvary. Show him the three crosses outlined against the darkening afternoon sky. Point out to him the central cross, the position of greatest dishonor of the three. Let him look upon the Being nailed to that cross as if He were the vilest of criminals, hated by His people and the object of their opprobrium, dying helpless and in unspeakable agony; and he will agree with you that here human nature has been brought to the utmost depths of degradation.

It is St. Paul who, in order the better to impress upon us the necessity and value of humility, puts before us as a perfect pattern of self-humiliation the Incarnation

The Sacrament of Friendship

of our Lord and His death upon the cross. He speaks thus: “ For let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death: even the death of the cross.”

Thus the Son of God, not satisfied with casting aside all His dignity as God, leaving behind Him in heaven all His grandeur, and becoming the poorest of men, became also in appearance a criminal, sought and suffered the death of a criminal, hiding the Godhead during life, and veiling still the Divine dignity and power when a death of degradation finally freed Him from His sufferings.

For an unbeliever in the Real Presence, a lower depth of self-abasement is simply beyond conception. Anything beneath this

Object of our Faith

would, to the mind of such a one, involve the loss of existence as a rational being. And yet, there was another, a final descent in the Divine plan of self-abasement.

When the Son of God became man, He did, indeed, set aside the infinite difference between Creator and creature, and allow Himself to appear in a form infinitely beneath that of God. And yet He possessed the dignity that is inseparable from human nature, inferior as it is, and made no attempt to conceal it. As a man He manifested the normal traits and all the virtues of which human nature is capable. His appearance amongst men compelled respect and admiration, reluctant as His enemies may have been to admit this. We know that the leaders of the people feared His power and influence over others, and that a cultured man like Pilate, to take only one example, was deeply impressed by the words and manner of our Lord.

But in the Blessed Sacrament, even this

The Sacrament of Friendship

dignity and compelling influence that escaped, as it were, from beneath the veil that hid His Divinity, is effectually concealed. Here He appears as an inanimate substance, a something without soul, without life. He allows Himself to be clothed by the appearance of a substance that serves one of the commonest purposes in our lives. He permits Himself thus concealed to be used daily as this substance is used, to be taken into our bodies as our ordinary food is taken, wishing by this method both to nourish us spiritually and to show by the analogy of physical nourishment how He is imparting an immeasurably higher form of sustenance to our souls.

And what a vista of possible insult is opened up for us by the thought of this voluntary helplessness of our Lord! And how often, as the event proves, does this possibility become actual. Given the decision of our Saviour to hide His Human-

Object of our Eaith

ity under the appearance of bread, to suffer men to handle and receive Him when, and under whatsoever conditions they please, and you have no limit to the indignity that can be placed upon Him. And the history of Christianity bears sad witness to many and many an instance of hardened hearts or careless ones presuming on this voluntary state of weakness assumed by an All-powerful God.

Daily is the passion of our Lord duplicated so far as the attitude of some men towards their Saviour, and their actual treatment of the Divine Victim, are concerned. In the Blessed Sacrament He has put Himself at the mercy of the world, for every moment men may see the Son of God just as truly a prisoner as He was on the first Good Friday. Then the ropes and chains bound Him; now the frail, but equally effective, species of bread bind His arms and hold Him captive. On the cross with a word or an act of His

The Sacrament of Friendship

will He could have freed Himself. Now, likewise, a single manifestation of the hidden power could be enough to strike dead any one who dared insult Him. But He will not force apart the fetters that He Himself has put in place.

On the weary way to Calvary, thousands whom He had helped thronged about Him; but none consoled Him. He “came unto His own and His own received Him not.” To-day, many more thousands whom He has visited and strengthened, although they daily pass the church where He dwells a willing Prisoner in the tabernacle, never stop and speak to Him, never receive Him save as a matter of duty or routine, and never think of offering acts of reparation. And in each case it is the chosen ones, “His own,” who treat Him so coldly.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, a man with treason in his heart, with his soul possessed by satan, dared to treat the Son of God as a friend, dared to kiss

Object of our Faith

the One he was betraying. Unspeakable presumption ! Equalled, however, and even surpassed in its foulness, by the Catholic of to-day who, in a state of mortal sin, with a like sacrilegious boldness, dares not only to greet this same Divine Victim as a friend, but to receive Him into his body.

And we read also in the history of the Passion of our Lord how they struck Him and spat upon Him and mocked Him, and how they placed Him on a cross between two criminals. Many times since then have His enemies—and some of them fallen Catholics—treated Him with like indignity. What one of us has not heard of insults offered our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament? Insults so vile that one hesitates even to mention them. Actually men have spat upon the Sacred Host; men have bent the knee in contemptuous mock-adoration before the tabernacle. They have seized with sin-stained hands the consecrated

The Sacrament of Friendship

particles, have thrown them into the dirt and trampled upon them. They have even given them to brute animals.

Thus to-day the hidden Lord silently bears the most fearful insults of man just as He did in Gethsemane, in the streets of Jerusalem and on Calvary. And all this He foresaw when He took bread and wine into His sacred hands on Holy Thursday night, and changed them into His Body and Blood. All the indignities, all the contempt, all the insults, all the ingratitude, all the sacrilegious Communions of the centuries to come passed before His mind. But His love for us triumphed over all. His affection for poor, fallen humanity cast a veil upon the insults He was to receive, and held before His eyes only our weakness, our need of His Sacramental Presence, and the immeasurable good this Presence amongst us was to accomplish.

Our Lord has, therefore, abased Himself to the very depths of degradation in every

Object of our Faith

possible manner, sin, of course, excepted, because of His love for us, because He foresees that this self-abasement will bring about the salvation of many millions of His creatures. And no matter how vile is the treatment He sometimes receives in the Blessed Sacrament, He still prays to His Father in heaven that even His revilers may come to see the wickedness of their ways, and turn in repentance to the One whom they now revile.

A wonderful conversion that occurred on Mt. Calvary would give Him a reason for His hope, even if He had not the perfect fore-knowledge of God. “ Then were crucified with him two thieves: one on the right hand, and one on the left * * *. And they that were crucified with him reviled him.” But now, to go on with the narrative of this conversion, a strange thing happened. For a time, while the people passing before our Lord mocked Him and taunted Him with His inability

The Sacrament of Friendship

to save Himself although He had protested that He was the Son of God, the two thieves took part in this blasphemy. But one of them gradually became conscious of something unusual in the manner of our Saviour. Not an answer did He make to the taunts offered by His tormentors, nor did His intense pain cause Him to curse and blaspheme as the two thieves were doing. It is true, the lips of Jesus moved, but it was in prayer, as the thief could tell from the words of the Psalms that now and then reached his ears. Curiously he watched this very extraordinary Sufferer. The conviction slowly grew upon him that the Man beside him was not a criminal; was, in fact, different from ordinary men. The patience and self-restraint of our Lord, especially His words of forgiveness, filled him with astonishment. Turning to the other thief, he “rebuked him, saying: Neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation? And we in-

Object of our Faith

deed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done no evil.”

Here was the first step towards salvation: recognition of guilt, and a frank acknowledgment of it. The patience of our Lord under insult, in the offering of which he himself had a prominent part, wins at last a signal victory in the case of the repentant thief. Contrition secured, the next step is easily taken, following naturally as it does from the newly-born hope of pardon. Turning again to our Saviour, he begs a part in the life to come: “ And he said to Jesus: Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom.” And with what a thrill of loving triumph did the dying Saviour speak the words of promise and implied pardon: “ Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise.”

When we consider the previous life of the repentant thief, the crimes of which he

The Sacrament of Friendship

was guilty, the obvious lack of religion in his heart, the hardening effect of a career spent in estrangement from all decent men, and of a cruel and shameful death publicly inflicted, we can truly regard this conversion as one of the most wonderful in the history of man's relations with his God.

It was brought about, of course, by the grace given to the thief by the Son of God who secured the necessary and sufficient dispositions in the object of His love by the example of His patient endurance of the most awful agony and most shameful punishment.

After the first movements of the heart of the poor thief towards our Saviour, the completion of his conversion was almost instantaneous. And in every possible way did he show this conversion to those about him. He defended our Saviour and praised Him, rebuked his fellow-thief, and finally, thinking of himself, sought pardon and a place in the Lord's Kingdom. Wonderful

Object of our Faith

as was his conversion, his public profession of faith was equally pronounced and remarkable.

We who have received the gift of faith in the normal manner, and who have had practically no obstacle to overcome in the first steps towards strengthening it, should learn from the example of the good thief on the cross a lesson most applicable to our relations with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Hidden under the appearances of bread, He is now as close to us as He was to the thief on the cross when humanity alone concealed His Divinity. He is upbraided and reviled and blasphemed just as truly now as then. Are we as ardent in our service and praise of Him as was the converted criminal? Are we doing what we can to repress open irreverence to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament? Or, if we have little or no opportunity of doing this, are

The Sacrament of Friendship

we making acts of reparation for the insults offered our Lord?

Let us also ask ourselves whether we are putting our faith in the Real Presence to the very practical and personal test of asking favors from the hidden Lord. Do we make frequent and full use of the presence of God, doubly veiled by the species of bread and by the flesh and form of man? Do we, "believing both, and both confessing, seek the boon that sought the thief repenting?"

Let us, in a spirit of deep love and reverence and humility, turn our eyes towards the hidden Deity, confess our faults to Him, praise His patience, perfect innocence and power, and beg Him to be ever mindful of us:

"Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom." Thus prayed the convert criminal on the cross with all the fervor and fulness of a hope that sprang from the first visit of faith to his

Object of our Faith

clouded mind and misdirected will. And for this boon, O Lord, do I pray to-day, I who am privileged to be as close to Thee as was Thy fellow-sufferer on the first Good Friday.

Only now how changed are the conditions! I do not say: “when Thou shalt come into Thy Kingdom,” for now, Thy agony over, Thou art gloriously reigning in the realms of unspeakable peace. The cross indeed still stands in the centre of Christianity, and still does it drop upon me the saving blood of my Redeemer. But it stands now in power and glory, no longer an instrument of actual torture, but a triumphant vindication of the Majesty and Justice and Mercy of the Son of God.

Near to Thee, then, in Thy glory, though Thy Godhead still is hidden, I beg with all the intensity that springs from sorrow and hope, that Thou wilt remember me, now that Thou art come into Thy Kingdom; that Thou wilt give me a single thought,

The Sacrament of Friendship

and that of Thee; a single purpose, and that to serve Thee; a single reward, and that to live with Thee now, and ever afterwards through the ages without end.
Amen.

CHAPTER V

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Plagas, sicut Thomas, non intueor,
Deum tamen meum te confiteor.

Not, like Thomas, do I see the wounds,
But still do I declare: Thou art my God.

We are all familiar with the Gospel account of the obstinacy of St. Thomas who, until he could actually see his Saviour and put his hands into the sacred wounds, refused to believe that the Lord had really risen. We know also with what tender and condescending forbearance our Lord granted his unreasonable request. The words of rebuke He spoke on this occasion are of special significance for us in our relations with the Real Presence of our Saviour in the Blessed Sacrament: "Jesus saith to him: Because thou hast seen me,

The Sacrament of Friendship

Thomas, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed.”

Of equal significance is His warm commendation of St. Peter’s clear and eloquent profession of faith, given a little less than a year before this: “ And Jesus saith to them: But whom do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said: Thou art Christ the Son of the living God. And Jesus answering, said to him: Blessed art thou, Simon Bar Jona: because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven.”

These two incidents force us to admit, that the presence of the visible Saviour in the midst of men did not dispense with the necessity of faith, did not make unnecessary a definite surrender of the intellect to the word of God in the matter of the Divinity of Christ. We often marvel at the slowness of belief that constantly showed itself in the words and acts of

Profession of Faith

the disciples of our Lord. But we must remember that the Majesty of the Godhead was hidden by our Lord's human nature, perfect and wonderful as this nature was in its own order.

Nor had the Holy Ghost come as yet to dwell permanently and in His fulness in the souls of the apostles. And marvellous as were the miracles worked by our Lord, they of themselves would not create faith in those who beheld them. Something else was wanted. Otherwise, many thousands who saw the wonderful deeds of Jesus and remained faithless, would at once have acknowledged Him as God. No one could believe in the Divinity of Christ without the supernatural gift of faith: no one could come to the Son unless the grace of God first drew him. And even then, the recipient of this grace might effectually resist it. Our Lord praised St. Peter because the Prince of the apostles heeded the Divine voice speaking in his

The Sacrament of Friendship

soul, and boldly gave utterance to the conviction thus aroused within him.

The visible presence of the God-man was, naturally speaking, counteracted to a great extent by the fact that it was something entirely new, and was not expected by the Jews to take place in the manner in which it did, although the Old Testament prophecies were quite detailed and explicit on this point. There was no precedent, therefore, to guide the apostles; no momentum of faith gathering force from the past to bear them on. They were pioneers, as it were, chosen, not from a body of men trained, or at least warned, beforehand, but from the rank and file of the ordinary Hebrews.

Of course God gave them all the grace they needed for the development of His plan of Salvation. But that plan left something to them, and was to be worked out by means of a human as well as a Divine element. Hence the many faults and fail-

Profession of Faith

ures of the disciples. God was present with them, but not with so compelling a presence that they must needs acknowledge Him without the merit of supernatural faith on their part. Both the praise given to St. Peter and the censure to St. Thomas emphasize our Blessed Lord's evident desire to impress upon all Christians the absolute necessity of possessing faith, of submitting the mind to the voice of God speaking through authorized representatives.

And this voice speaks just as truly to Christians of the twentieth century as it did to the apostles. Although we cannot see the form and features of the Man-God as did the apostles, we have other, though indeed lesser, advantages which they did not possess. The Church, the Depositary of all revelation, exists now in its final and complete form; it did not thus exist in the days of the Public Ministry. The Holy Ghost dwells with us in the fulness

The Sacrament of Friendship

of His power; the at first earthly-minded apostles were not granted this privilege until Pentecost. They, as we have seen, were the pioneers of the new faith; back of us, on the contrary, is the unbroken belief of nineteen centuries in the Divinity of the Catholic Church, and in the reality of its Founder's presence in our midst.

It is impossible for us to estimate adequately the value of this latter form of assistance. It is literally thrust upon us, and if we are sincere we cannot escape it. Take, for example, the Sacrifice of the Mass. The apostles had, it is true, the inestimable privilege of witnessing Jesus Christ in Person consecrating bread and wine for the first time. And after His Resurrection, He "broke bread" with them; but this was a short-lived privilege. We, however, have beheld the same Divine Action as far back as we can remember; It is not something new coming into our lives. And we know that for centuries be-

Profession of Faith

fore us Catholics have enjoyed the same blessed privilege.

We cannot claim, therefore, any great credit for our act of faith in the Real Presence. If we did, we would be practically putting ourselves very much in the attitude of St. Thomas, only not going quite so far as he did. We would not, indeed, be insisting that we be given the chance to see and touch the wounded Saviour, but we would be praising ourselves for giving up that satisfaction which we might quite reasonably demand if we so desired.

Let us strive to make more and more firm an attitude of mind and heart just the opposite of this, and to cultivate a feeling of gratitude to God for having bestowed upon us the great grace of faith in the Real Presence. Let us, in all humility, make full profession of this faith whenever we visit our Blessed Lord in the Sacrament of the Altar, saying, as St. Peter did in

The Sacrament of Friendship

the presence of his Master: “Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Our protestation of faith must not be merely formal, nor should it depart completely from our lives with the passing of the thought or the feeling that prompted it. It should, on the contrary, act upon, and in its turn be influenced by, our habits of life in relation to the Blessed Sacrament. It is not enough to say, with deep feeling: “Thou art my God,” although it is good to do this. We must act consistently and adequately in accordance with our belief.

The most obvious and superficial requirement is a respectful manner in the presence of our Lord. Another very evident corollary of faith in the Blessed Sacrament is the practice of paying visits to our Lord in the tabernacle. Closely allied to this is that greatest and most fruitful of all means of manifesting our faith—frequent and fervent Holy Com-

Profession of Faith

munion. It is here that we find the fullest and most public profession of our belief that could possibly be imagined.

Every time we go to the altar to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ we say in a manner most unmistakable: “Thou art my God.” The world is, or can be if it so wishes, a witness of our profession.

Some of us, no doubt, have met certain non-Catholics who have expressed surprise at the lack of appreciation so sadly evident in the relations of many of us with the Blessed Sacrament. “Could I believe,” said a fervent Protestant, “that Christ is really present in your Communion, I would live my spare moments prostrate on the steps of the altar, and would receive as often as I could.” This attitude is typical of many others outside the Church, and would be verified in many more did they think at all about the matter.

If only we could get that perspective.

The Sacrament of Friendship

But we have been so near to the Blessed Sacrament, and so careless of Its reality, that we do not see its beauties in all their true proportions. It must seem strange to outsiders that people who believe in the presence of Jesus Christ on their altars, and who have the opportunity of receiving Him every day, treat with so much practical indifference this transcendent fact of their religious life, and sometimes permit an entire year to go by without receiving Holy Communion.

Without a doubt, the carelessness of many Catholics in this regard has been a serious stumbling-block to quite a few sincere unbelievers who have been diligent enough in their search for the truth to watch the religious practices of their acquaintances who happen to be Catholics. And this sad effect of an inadequate profession of faith in the Real Presence must suggest to thoughtful Catholics the very serious duty they have of trying to spread

Profession of Faith

and foster a belief in the Blessed Sacrament where it does not already exist. If carelessness scandalizes, it is equally true that a fervor which shows itself in frequent Communions, and in a noticeable effort to derive the fullest profits from them, must give very marked edification to observant Protestants.

The most practical and the easiest way, therefore, to impress outsiders with the reality of our faith in the presence of Christ on our altars is to treat that Gift as we should, to respect It and to receive It in a manner as consistent with Its Dignity as human nature permits.

This manner of spreading faith in the Real Presence is, perhaps, for many of us the only practicable one; or, at least, opportunities of another kind come very less frequently to the majority of Catholics. But still there are other ways, and other occasions do present themselves. Some people are so situated that oppor-

The Sacrament of Friendship

tunities of a different kind are constantly opening out before them. Such are those, for example, who live in frequent and close contact with sincere non-Catholics of an inquiring frame of mind. What a splendid service could these favored Catholics do for the Blessed Sacrament. How active in the sowing of seed and in the later harvesting of a ripening faith could they make their profession of faith in the Real Presence.

Let them live as if they believe what they profess to believe. Let frequent Communion, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and a reverent behaviour in the church be a vivid illustration of an intelligent explanation of doctrine, when such explanation is asked for, or the opportunity is afforded of giving it fruitfully and without offence, even though it is not asked for.

This is not demanding very much of a good Catholic. It is not an unreasonable request. In earthly matters, do you not

Profession of Faith

speak with respect and love and enthusiasm of one whom you admire very much? Do you not try to make others feel towards him the same way you yourself feel? Suppose a friend has conferred a great favor upon you, has shown his love for you in a wonderful manner, and continues to do so. If your heart is full of gratitude towards him, as it should be, will not this fountain of love, welling up within you, seek to find an outlet in communication with others? Would you not like to have others understand how good your friend has been to you? If they, too, needed the affectionate assistance which your friend wished to give to others besides yourself, would you not, in a spirit of unselfish devotion, try to help him diffuse his goodness by bringing others within the sphere of his influence? This, indeed, is characteristic of true gratitude.

And in the relations of Catholics with their Lord in the Holy Eucharist, we have

The Sacrament of Friendship

these conditions duplicated in a relationship lifted to an infinitely higher plane by the fact that the Son of God is the Friend who continually aids you and wishes to help all men as He helps you. The possibilities of missionary work in this direction are exceedingly precious, so much so that thousands of zealous apostles of Christianity have cheerfully given up all they possessed, home and comfort and friends, and eventually, in many cases, even life itself, in order that they might seize opportunities of this kind and spread knowledge of the Real Presence amongst the millions that sit in darkness and know not the priceless gift of the Blessed Sacrament.

It is given to comparatively few, however, to diffuse in so wonderful a manner the knowledge and appreciation of the Real Presence. For many who wish to perform a part in this great work, the opportunities given them are contracted

Profession of Faith

by various, and oftentimes practically ir-removable, obstacles.

But another kind of opportunity of fostering faith in the Blessed Sacrament comes more easily and frequently within the reach of Catholics: and this concerns exclusively those within the fold. It is a sphere of influence accessible for us all. Its existence is based upon the fact that there is no man whose love for our Lord in the Holy Eucharist is full and perfect, no man, therefore, who does not need the edification of good example, the help of prayer, the stimulus of appeal, and, in some cases, the chastisement of reproof.

This duty of advancing the interests of the Blessed Sacrament among Catholics devolves especially upon superiors of all kinds, particularly upon priests and parents. It is the preeminent work of the pastor of souls to dispense the Food of Life, and to foster conditions in the ones who receive It that will insure the best

The Sacrament of Friendship

possible use of this Food. In the performance of the latter part of this double duty, he is dependent for success to a greater or less extent upon parents and others who have children under their charge.

How tender for all of us are the memories that cluster about our childhood's devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. How deep have been the impressions made upon this devotion by the example and teaching of parents and other superiors in regard to the Holy Eucharist. We may be unable to recall any particular act that impressed us, or any detailed instruction given to us. But this inability is not necessarily due to any defect in example or teaching. Some words and some forms of example, it is true, fall only upon the surface of the soul and are lightly brushed away. Others sink so deep, and affect our habits of thought and action so quickly and so permanently, that they are almost immediately lost sight of in the completion

Profession of Faith

of the work for which they were intended.

But the work has been done; and if we cannot recall the means used, we are conscious of the effect these means have produced in giving birth to the happiest moments of our lives. A happiness in many cases so vivid in our memories that we look back with wonder and intense longing to that early period of our life with God, and wish for a return of the ardor and innocence of youth that make possible so keen a perception of the Saviour's presence.

This duty of instructing and edifying the young in all that relates to the Real Presence is so plain and so important a one that it should not need to be dwelt upon. And yet, there are parents who have but the weakest idea of their obligation in this regard, parents who vainly try to shift this terrible responsibility entirely on to the shoulders of others who have charge of the child for a much shorter period of

The Sacrament of Friendship

time than they have. How little they realize to what an extent they are lessening for their children the opportunity of gaining that unspeakable happiness afforded by the Blessed Sacrament. How little they reckon with the future when both their God and their children will reproach them for their carelessness.

Readily do they profess their faith in the Real Presence. Easily to their lips come the words: "Thou art my God." But their protestation of faith is so limited, so lacking in life and vigor! And thus it is, though in varying degrees, with other classes of Catholics. The declaration of faith they give to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament lacks, in many a case, the fulness and energy that our Lord would have it possess.

Let it be the purpose of every true Christian so to profess his faith in the Real Presence, by his life as well as by his lips, that the world will be the better

Profession of Faith

for his edifying belief. And this is possible for all of us, even for those whose opportunities seem the least.

A great cause ennobles the lowliest of those who embrace it, and raises the dignity and power of their service in proportion to the nobility of the cause, and the degree of loyalty given to it. Here on our altars is the King of Kings. His cause is the Glory of God through the salvation of souls. The most abject slave can enlist under this Leader, as well as the most powerful monarch. Of each is required the same profession of faith in the Real Presence. Let this profession be made permanent and vital by a life of service in the greatest of causes, by continued loyalty to the Blessed Sacrament, and only God can measure the merit and dignity of the service and loyalty thus given, as only God can give the final and perfect reward to the faithful lover of Jesus Christ under the form of bread and wine.

CHAPTER VI

GROWTH IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

Fac me tibi semper magis credere,
In te spem habere, te diligere.

Grant to my belief and hope in Thee,
And to my love for Thee, a constant growth.

We cannot reflect too often and too deeply upon the words spoken by our Blessed Lord to St. Thomas at the Last Supper: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me." No man can be saved, no man can reach heaven except it be through Jesus Christ. No thought or word or act can have any value in the sight of God save by reason of the merits of His Divine Son made Man. It was Christ crucified on Mt. Calvary who purchased our Redemption; and from that sacrifice of infinite value

Faith, Hope and Love

has come all that is of merit, all that is truly noble and good in the life of man.

From this inexhaustible treasury of divine help the grace of God is dispensed to us by means of prayer and the seven sacraments. Of these latter the greatest is undoubtedly the Blessed Sacrament. Through this comes to us not alone the grace of God, but the God of grace Himself. By reason of this Sacrament, our Divine Friend, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, remains in our midst ready to grant our petitions and to come in Person into our souls.

Truly, then, the faith of a Catholic must embrace as an essential and most important object, the Real Presence of Christ on our altars. So vital is this fact in our religious life, that, practically speaking, our faith as a whole can almost be said to stand or fall with that phase of faith which reaches out to the Blessed Sacrament. In practice, at least, no Catholic

The Sacrament of Friendship

can be really pious and devout unless he has a vigorous faith in the presence of the Son of God under the appearances of bread and wine.

We see, then, how essential it is for us to cultivate a deep faith in this Divine Presence, and how pleasing to our Lord is our prayer for a constant increase in this faith. It is a well-known truth that no one can stand still, or, rather, that no one can with impunity act on the principle that he need not try to advance in spiritual matters. If this be the case, he will surely fall back. We must make an effort to advance, even if our purpose be to remain stationary in our religious life.

How sad it would be if we were to permit our belief in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament to grow weak, and perhaps disappear entirely. We must bear in mind that such a calamity is possible. Let him who stands take heed lest he fall. And easy and fast

Faith, Hope and Love

is the descent to the dark depths of doubt once it is fairly well begun.

A weakening belief in the Blessed Sacrament tends to destroy the foundation and entire framework of our faith as a whole, much more rapidly and effectually than a corresponding weakening of faith in most other doctrines of the Church. And the reason is clear, because in the Blessed Sacrament we have in far greater abundance than elsewhere the Food that nourishes the life of our souls.

It is true that there are other ways of feeding the soul and keeping present in it that sanctifying grace without which there could be no real faith at all. But they supply a much smaller amount of spiritual sustenance than the Eucharist does. And while these other means are capable, under extraordinary conditions, of keeping the soul alive, they cannot do so unaided under normal conditions of Catholic life which demand of all who are

The Sacrament of Friendship

able a periodical reception of Holy Communion.

Our belief in our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is, then, the ordinary condition upon which depends to a great extent our whole life of faith. If this belief be weakened, we are in grave danger of being cut off entirely from that incalculable supply of grace upon which the soul can feed so abundantly. And, on the contrary, if the belief in the Real Presence of Him through whom alone we can go to the Father is strengthened, just so much the less danger is there of losing the deposit of sanctifying grace and the virtue of faith in our souls.

We should pray earnestly to our Lord that He increase our belief in Him and in His Real Presence. This is a prayer that many of us never think of making. For some reason or other quite a few people act as if faith in the Real Presence were a fixed and invariable fact in their lives; they seem to believe that it cannot

Faith, Hope and Love

and need not be increased. It is true that implicitly every Catholic who loves the Blessed Sacrament desires an increase in his faith in It. But still, it is far better for this desire to be explicit, far better for us to offer up some prayers with this purpose in view. Certainly by acting thus we are more likely to bring about a growth in our faith. Ultimately, of course, it is God who does the real work. Man is helpless to acquire by his unaided efforts either the first deposit of faith, or any growth of faith. But certain things are demanded of him as his part in the work, even though it is God who gives the increase; as it is God who gave the original gift.

What a splendid opportunity of asking for this growth of faith is afforded by the presence on the altar of God's Son, of Him who said: "Ask, and you shall receive." Surely a request of this kind is most pleasing to Him; and the granting

The Sacrament of Friendship

of it is conditioned only by our own dispositions.

An explicit act of faith in our Lord's presence should immediately precede or follow an appeal for stronger faith. This, and a reverent study of the various arguments given as proof of this doctrine, together with meditation upon the love of our Lord for us, His unlimited power, absolute truthfulness and all-perfect knowledge, will supply some of those conditions which are helpful in enabling us to secure, and properly cooperate with, the grace which God gives us to strengthen and quicken the influence of our wills upon the assent of the intellect.

Let us frequently use our wills to move our intellects to make a specific act of assent to our Lord's Real Presence on the altar, and to the very important fact of His predilection for us and His desire to help us in every possible way. Thus our belief in the Son of God made Man and

Faith, Hope and Love

present in the Blessed Sacrament will grow more and more robust, and more fruitful for this life and the life to come.

Closely linked with our faith in Christ present under the appearances of bread and wine, is our hope in Him thus hidden by this humble veil; so closely, indeed, that once faith is destroyed, hope vanishes also, because it is faith that supplies our reasons for hope. And, on the contrary, if faith grows stronger, hope has a corresponding increase. Thus when we pray for a growth of faith in Christ, we implicitly ask for an increase in hope also. But, in addition to this, it is good to seek to strengthen our hope in Christ independently of our efforts in this other direction. It is good for us to dwell directly and exclusively upon this great virtue of hope so indispensable for our salvation.

We know that hope is a divine virtue by which we confidently expect, with God's help, to obtain everlasting happiness, as

The Sacrament of Friendship

well as to have at our disposal the means of securing this happiness. It, too, like faith, comes from God alone, and He alone can strengthen it within us. The same opportunities given us by the Real Presence for begging a growth in faith are equally available when we seek an increase in the virtue of hope.

The object of our hope is here before us, may actually be taken into our bodies. What a perfect and most assuring pledge of future, eternal possession of the Beatific Vision is given us by the present possession of the veiled Godhead! Our heart's desire goes out to full happiness. Here within our reach, or actually in our bodies, is the One who alone can give this happiness.

And now, while I hope, I hold in my possession the Infinite Source and Object of my hope, waiting only for the final dissolution to see the veil drop fully from before Him, and the Divine Features stand

Faith, Hope and Love

forth revealed in their all-satisfying beauty. What better reason for hoping in this God of Truth and Love could be imagined than His presence on our altars or in our hearts? And what greater incentive for seeking to perfect our hope in Him so that every possible danger of weakening or losing it will be driven and kept afar off?

The presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is not only a pledge of eternal happiness in itself, but is also a guarantee for the attainment of those means of securing this happiness which are confidently expected to be placed at his disposal by one in whom dwells the virtue of hope. Hope prompts us to expect eternal happiness; and in the Blessed Sacrament we find the Object of this happiness: hope prompts us to expect the means necessary for the attainment of eternal happiness; and by this same Sacrament we

The Sacrament of Friendship

are either given the means directly or rightly guided to their attainment.

It is true that Penance is necessary for one who has fallen into mortal sin. A man consciously in the state of mortal sin cannot gain heaven without either the Sacrament of Penance, or, under certain conditions, perfect contrition. So it might seem that the Blessed Sacrament, which influences only those souls that are in the state of grace, cannot supply in every case the means necessary for gaining eternal felicity, and that, therefore, our hope in it is not a sufficient guarantee of our salvation.

In practice, of course, Penance is necessary for the vast majority of us. But this necessity does not imply the inability of the Blessed Sacrament, of Itself, to conduct a Catholic to heaven. It implies, at the most, that the Catholic who needs Penance suffers this need because he has not availed himself of all the grace that the

Faith, Hope and Love

Holy Eucharist can give him. For let it be clearly understood that, although Holy Communion does not normally forgive mortal sin, it does possess the power to keep man in such a state that he will never fall into mortal sin. And as a matter of fact it has exercised this power whenever the communicant has done his part. Quite a few saints have kept their baptismal innocence, and kept it principally by means of the Blessed Sacrament.

It is needless, then, to say that a Sacrament which has power to safeguard us against future falls by acting as a spiritual Prophylactic when there is question of the disease of mortal sin, includes the means necessary for gaining heaven. For it is mortal sin alone that stands between us and the eternal enjoyment of the companionship of God.

Important and essential as are the two virtues we have just discussed, it is only when we beg a constant growth in the

The Sacrament of Friendship

third of the great trinity of virtues that our prayer reaches its highest perfection. “Grant to my love for thee a constant growth.” As St. Paul tells us, love is the greatest of the three. Faith and hope have no value in the supernatural order unless they are animated by love. They will cease to exist in the dawning of the new Life where love alone will last.

How important it is, then, for us to cherish and perfect in our souls this greatest of virtues. And it goes without saying that we have here a very difficult task, a more difficult one than that which concerns faith and hope. One reason for this is that the two latter appeal directly to self. It is very much to our own interest to strengthen our faith and hope; and we know it, and very properly use this knowledge as a principle motive. Indeed, hope is primarily concerned with our personal happiness.

But in the case of love for God, it is

Faith, Hope and Love

His own interests that must be of primary importance. We know, of course, that we personally profit by every increase in our love for God. We know that the greater our love for Him, the greater will be our reward. But motives based upon this knowledge must not be too prominent. Certainly we should not use them as principal motives, for if we did we would be loving God really for our own, and not for His sake. Here we have the essence of perfect love for God: to love Him for His own sake. Theologians call this the love of benevolence, or the love of friendship. When we possess it, we wish God all honor, all glory and every good; and we strive to obtain these for Him.

To strengthen this love, which every Christian in the state of grace possesses, does indeed seem a difficult task, but we need not falter at the thought of its performance. In every effort that we make, let us bear this fact in mind: It is God

The Sacrament of Friendship

who gives it to us in the first place and who strengthens it in our souls when we sincerely seek its increase. Let us not say: “I am unable to love God in the way just described, because I cannot feel such a love.”

The objection is quite beside the point. The love of God that we strive to strengthen in our souls resides essentially in the will, not in the feelings. It is perfectly possible to love God in the right way, while at the same time we may be, for example, mourning the death of some friend or relative and thus showing greater evidence of affection than we ever show for God Himself. And yet, while we thus manifest our deep grief, we know that God is still the noblest Object of our love; and we know, too—and here is the crucial test—that if occasion demanded it we would, with the help of His grace, sacrifice all for Him.

It is the will’s readiness to do whatever

Faith, Hope and Love

God's infinite loveliness demands of us that proves the existence within us of a love for Him far greater than the other movements of love that enter into our lives. For the latter have the use of our faculties only when, and in so far as, God does not demand them for Himself.

This love that God demands of us does not, therefore, exclude from our lives a love for creatures, provided we love them for their good and true and noble qualities, or for any reason that does not involve sin. For whatever is lovable in creatures is contained eminently in God, and was given to these creatures for the very purpose of attracting the attention and winning the love of man. Only it must not be sought as an end in itself: it must not make us lose sight of the One who gave it. Observing this precaution, we may love the lesser good without fear, for then we shall, consciously or unconsciously, be brought to a greater love for God Himself.

The Sacrament of Friendship

Let us, then, without needless worry, without unnecessary scruples as to our feelings towards our Great Friend, beg of Him, in this, the Sacrament of His Friendship, the grace to grow in our love of Friendship for Him. As we see His pure, unselfish love for us emphasized by the lowly veil of humanity, and by the still more lowly veil thrown over this humanity by the species of bread and wine; as we study and understand more fully how He has abased Himself for our sakes, and how He exemplifies here on the altar the highest type of friendship; as other thoughts suggested by these come into our minds, let us beg of Him the greatest favor He can give us, short of Himself—that our love of Friendship for Him may become every day of our lives more and more like unto His own for us. And this we ask as friend from Friend, knowing that He will not refuse us.



A MEMORIAL OF CALVARY

CHAPTER VII

A MEMORIAL OF CALVARY

O memoriale mortis Domini!

O Memorial of the Master's death!

The note of sadness heretofore more or less subdued by the reverent strains of adoration and the exultant chords of faith, hope and love, now sounds forth clear and penetrating and insistent. To one unfamiliar with the real meaning of the Blessed Sacrament, it might seem strangely out of place to speak of death in connection with perfect, unending Life; and yet, the element of sadness must be present in our relations with the Holy Eucharist, else the harmony of this glorious symphony of Life and Love would be essentially lacking. For the Blessed Sacrament was instituted in the shadow

The Sacrament of Friendship

of death, draws its efficacy from the fact of death, is given to man to save him from death, and was intended, as our Lord Himself tells us, to remind the world of His death.

We know that the sufferings of our Saviour are the source of His presence on the altar; that were there no Calvary there would have been no Cenacle, with all that this implies; and that the tabernacle would not now be the Temple of God's choice had there been no triumph of the Cross. And clearly as we know it, this knowledge was much more vividly present to our Lord Himself as He sat at table with His apostles on the night before His death. Lovingly may we look into His soul and see there how closely sorrow clings to the love that possesses Him.

As He breaks the Bread of Life for His little band of loved ones, and says the words: “Take ye and eat: this is my body which shall be delivered for you,”

Memorial of Calvary

there is before His mind the vision of that same Body delivered to the Jews on the morrow, bleeding and broken upon the cross. And the words of Isaias ring in His ears: “The whole head is sick and the whole heart is sad. From the sole of the foot unto the top of the head, there is no soundness therein: wounds and bruises and swelling sores.”

And when He holds to their lips the chalice and says to them: “This is the chalice, the new testament in my blood,” and they drink of it, how intensely vivid is the picture before Him of this same Blood lying scarlet on the stones of Pilate’s courtyard, clinging in drops to the thorns on His brow, dripping from the scourge, scattered along the way to Calvary, and staining darkly the rough wood of the cross.

The awful death that awaited Him stood forth in His mind, clear in all its terrible, minute details, as He gave to the chosen

The Sacrament of Friendship

few the Infinite Gift that drew all its beauty and permanence and life-giving power from the sufferings and death of a Divine Victim. The thought of sacrifice was uppermost in His mind. It was the purpose of His life on earth. How eagerly had He looked forward to this night, the beginning of the Consummation on Calvary! With what intense feeling did He speak the words: "With desire have I desired to eat this Pasch with you," the Pasch that meant so much to Him!

His soul, therefore, was dominated by this one thought of voluntary suffering, ending in voluntary death when the great Sacrifice would reach its triumphant climax. So perfectly was He possessed by this one Purpose, so completely did it fill His soul, that it was only natural for the thought of it to overflow, so that His words and acts would show forth the death already embraced by His will, and tend to impress others with its vivid reality and

Memorial of Calvary

infinite importance. And so He says to His apostles: "For as often as you shall eat this bread, and drink the chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord until He come."

Thus, in the very act of giving His friends His greatest manifestation of love, He warns them that they are not to lose sight of the terrible price He is paying for His generosity, and to bear in mind that His Sacrament is to be a memorial of His death, both for themselves and for all who shall ever have the privilege of receiving It.

It is easily to be seen how closely connected is the thought of suffering and death with the presence of our Lord upon the altar. So closely, indeed, that true and full devotion to the Real Presence demands a frequent and specific reference to what outsiders might look upon as an association of incompatible ideas. But for a Catholic this essential connection is a

The Sacrament of Friendship

fact of his religious life almost as obvious as it is fundamental.

From a knowledge of it, we gain valuable lessons which serve to guide us in our relations with the Blessed Sacrament. For it is perfectly reasonable that we should strive to pattern our own dispositions in our relations with the Body and Blood of our Lord upon those dispositions He very evidently wished His apostles to possess at the Last Supper. And certainly the words of Christ when He instituted the Blessed Sacrament show us that He desired His hearers to be impressed with the fact of His approaching passion and death. The thought of this will be an invaluable aid to us in our preparation for Holy Communion, and in our thanksgiving afterwards, as also in our visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

In every church, during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the two greatest events in the life of our Lord are being repeated,

Memorial of Calvary

or rather, continued: The Institution of the Blessed Sacrament and the Divine Tragedy of Calvary. We speak of them as two events, but they may very properly be referred to as one: The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for the Redemption of man.

When we assist at this Sacrifice, in the peace and security of our churches, how different are the circumstances from the impending danger and death that darkened the Cenacle, and the dire agony and final dissolution of Calvary! But if the circumstances are in many ways different, the essence of the Sacrifice, bloodless as it now is, is identical with that which the apostles witnessed. And if now Christ suffers and dies no more, this blessed exemption gives us all the more reason not to forget the anguish of Calvary, but to keep it clearly before our minds so that, with all the fulness and fervor of devotion, we may show

The Sacrament of Friendship

forth His death as often as we receive Holy Communion.

We must bear in mind that the Sacrifice of the Mass is not merely a memorial; it is a continuation of the Great Sacrifice with all its essential features unchanged. It is intended to be both a memorial of a Fact and the Fact Itself. As a memorial, a something sensible, which we can actually see taking place before our eyes, it helps to keep our minds fixed upon the Great Event in all the details of its original occurrence. And if we take full advantage of our opportunities, we shall possess the equivalent of all the privileges given to those who witnessed the Institution itself, and the Sacrifice of the next day.

But we should be more than mere passive spectators. A memorial must remind us of something. If it does not, it is no memorial so far as we are concerned. And one could easily get into so inactive a state

Memorial of Calvary

of mind in the presence of our Lord at Mass, or at Benediction, or in visits to the church, that this Memorial of the Master's death would remind us of that great tragedy but very faintly, possibly not at all.

Of course, we always acknowledge the presence of our Lord upon the altar, but does this presence always remind us of the passion and death of Jesus Christ? Does it bring to our memories any but the slightest thought of Calvary? And if it does not, is not principally because we have so often failed to follow up the suggestions it stirred in our minds, and neglected to dwell upon the sorrow and death that form the source of our present spiritual life and gladness?

It is only from one view-point that we can gain a full and lasting vision of real happiness. And that view-point is found upon the summit of Calvary. Standing there, with the bleeding body of Jesus

The Sacrament of Friendship

hanging over us, with His words of pity and pardon and earnest prayer falling upon our ears, with the gloom of a darkening day shrouding us about, we can see what sunlight and health and comfort and earthly pleasure would, of themselves, hide from our sight—that lasting peace and happiness come only in the wake of suffering and have only one foundation, the sacrifice of self to the will of God.

Reason alone would urge us to adopt every practicable measure to put ourselves in possession of this view-point. We find it to-day in the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. There we are actually looking upon the Divine Victim offering Himself for us just as truly as on Calvary; pitying and pardoning us, and praying for us just the same as on the first Good Friday.

But the gloom of Calvary does not shroud the tabernacle. The taunts and blasphemy of the frenzied rabble do not

Memorial of Calvary

pierce the peaceful quiet of the Sanctuary. Blood and dust and perspiration no longer stain the features of Jesus. Nor does His body quiver with excruciating agony. We ourselves must place all these features into our devotion to the Holy Eucharist, for it is of them, as well as of the essence of the Sacrifice, that the Blessed Sacrament is a Memorial. It is of these awful details that It reminds us and impels us to think, so that the Mount of Calvary may be present to our minds in as complete a manner as possible.

How valuable such a picture will be for us, how great a help meditation of this kind can give us, is appreciated only by those who earnestly try to keep before their minds the various events that cluster about the passion and death of our Lord. How helpful it is, for example, to utilize some of the time that precedes the Consecration for the purpose of meditating

The Sacrament of Friendship

upon one or more of the events that preceded the death upon Calvary.

When we go into the church to assist at the Holy Sacrifice, the knowledge that our Lord is present in the tabernacle will suggest, among other things, the imprisonment of the same Saviour in the guard-house in the early morning of Good Friday. And just as He was the object of coarse insults then, so now, perhaps at this very moment of our adoration and preparation, He is the object of insults just as vile; perhaps even now the sacred species that hide His Body are being desecrated by the foul hands of His enemies. Instances of this kind are not uncommon at the present day. But still, for all that, He patiently waits in the darkness and confinement of the tabernacle for the moment of His Mystical Death upon the altar.

The bread and wine are offered by the officiating priest, and Gethsemane flashes before us. We see in the Garden, the Vic-

Memorial of Calvary

tim of the morrow offering Himself in spirit to the Father, when, in the midst of every torment a sinless soul is capable of suffering, at the uttermost point of mental pain that man could ever reach and still live, His will stood firm as a rock against the surging waves of dread and anticipated agony that broke with relentless cruelty against it.

The Preface and the following parts of the Canon pass by, and we see in spirit the events that took place on Good Friday: the trials before Pilate and Herod, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the journey to Golgotha, the crucifixion. And then, when the triple tinkling of the bell tells us that the final moment has come, and we look upon the Host elevated for our adoration, how clearly we can see in spirit, through the gleam of the lighted candles, in the midst of the spiritual splendor of this most solemn moment, the rough cross raised upon this bloodless Calvary

The Sacrament of Friendship

of peace and sacred silence, the relaxing limbs, the drooping head with the crown of thorns still clinging to the brow, the face with the pallor of dissolution visible beneath the blood that has clotted upon it, and the eyes now dull and glassy in the first sleep of death. And the last words that came forth from His lips still linger in the quiet air, still ring and echo again and again in our minds: “ Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

And now that the Sacrifice is consummated, the first fervor that flows from the thought of it is sobered by the absolute solemnity of the event, and the following moments are spent kneeling in spirit by the tomb, or mingling with the sorrowing apostles mourning for their Master. But with the reception of Holy Communion comes into our minds the thought of the Resurrection Morn, of the glory of the Risen God. Our hearts beat in concordant gladness with those of the blessed few

Memorial of Calvary

who first saw the glorified Jesus; and our spirits rise in exultant happiness as the realization breaks in upon us that this same Saviour has actually given Himself to us, Body and Blood and Soul and Divinity; that now, for the few moments that precede the disappearance of the species, His heart throbs within us and His soul cleaves to our souls.

The memory of the Master's death that has filled our hearts before this is still present, but above it, and all about it, is the same intense joy and spiritual peace that gladdened the apostles once more united to their Beloved One, gloriously triumphant over death. And if we have suffered and still suffer—as who does not, in one way or another—is not the lesson of Christ's suffering and final victory clear to us now? Do we not see that all human pain, whether it be of the body or mind; whether it be caused by the death of a

The Sacrament of Friendship

loved one or by the thought of our own impending dissolution; whether it be the pain of separation from a dear friend, of being misunderstood by those we love and respect, or the torment of a physical malady that seems unbearable; whether it be occasioned by the loss of reputation or the loss of wealth; all this, no matter what it may be, no matter how intensely and continuously it may afflict us, is but our little share in the agony of our Blessed Lord, if we only accept it as such?

Most luminous is the lesson taught by this “Memorial of the Master’s death:” that all our crosses are but an exemplification of that fixed and all-embracing Mystery of our existence on earth—that life must have its origin in death, that happiness has no real existence save for him who has suffered, and suffered bravely and resignedly in imitation of the perfect pattern of the Son of God, who bore His un-

Memorial of Calvary

speakable pain through love for us, because He was and is our true and all-powerful Friend. “Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE LIFE OF THE SOUL

Panis vivus vitam praestans homini.

Living Bread that givest life to man.

“ I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the desert and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven: that if any man eat of it he may not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”

These words of our Blessed Lord, spoken at Capharnaum by the Sea of Galilee, are as little understood by the majority of men to-day as they were by the multitude who heard them on that memorable occasion when the promise of the Blessed Sacrament was formally given. He who gave

Life of the Soul

this promise had but a few hours before marvelously fed the famishing Jews whose admiration for Him had led them to neglect making provision for their bodily needs. Their hearts were warmed towards Him and their enthusiasm broke forth in an effort to make Him their King. Yet, in spite of these favorable dispositions, they failed to grasp the real meaning of His words.

We ask ourselves the reason; and the answer readily comes. They were so intensely absorbed in the world and the things of the world, that their conception of the life promised them by our Saviour was practically limited to the material world that for the time being held their minds. We see now how pitifully contracted was their vision, and what an immensity of meaning they missed because they did not recognize the Divinity of our Lord as well as the Humanity. They knew there was a future life; but by the Lake of Gen-

The Sacrament of Friendship

esareth, when God's Son offered them a share of this future, supernatural life, His words fell upon unheeding hearts.

Do we not see here an attitude of mind that characterizes most men to-day? Hold out to people at the present time two gifts: on the one hand a successful career in the world with all the means necessary for it; on the other, the promise of a place in the Father's Kingdom with the means of grace that its attainment requires. And the greater number of men will instinctively seize the former.

Nor is this true only of those who have little or no Christianity. It is verified, to a greater or less extent, in the lives of Catholics also. Daily we reject, pass by without a thought, many gifts of grace in preference for things that have no relation to the hereafter. We are very prone to live as if our Kingdom were of this world alone, and as if the natural life of man were the highest good attainable.

Life of the Soul

For the action of unbelievers there is some excuse, depending for its validity, of course, upon their sincerity; but for us there is none, far less than there was for the Jews by the Lake of Genesareth. We know that the soul lives forever, that its life hereafter is determined as to its nature by our conduct on earth. We know that God placed us here to save our souls. And this expression “to save our souls” does not mean merely to save them from destruction as implied by physical death. For God has willed that they be never lost in this sense.

Its deeper meaning is that we so conduct ourselves that, when body and soul are separated, the soul will be possessed of two kinds of life—that which it possessed when we were brought into the world, and that of which the first breath entered the soul at Baptism; in a word, that we possess both natural and supernatural life.

Heaven consists in the companionship

The Sacrament of Friendship

of God, a real and full companionship in which we see God face to face and live with Him. We are not capable of doing this unless we possess that kind of life which God Himself possesses. And this is not mere natural life, but something infinitely higher. Relying upon its natural life alone, the soul has absolutely no capacity to enjoy the presence of God. This capacity, this fitness for divine companionship, comes with the possession of supernatural life, and with it alone.

This all-important truth is emphasized in many places throughout the Bible. Let us take, for the purpose of illustration, two striking incidents narrated in the New Testament. Of these, the one that we shall discuss first occurred after the Resurrection, during the glorious life of our Lord on earth.

It is dawn on the shore of Genesareth. The mists of the early morning still shroud the surface of the Lake. Before us we

Life of the Soul

see the outlines of a fisherman's boat, riding deep in the water with its heavy burden of fishes. It comes slowly in to the beach, and from it spring the apostles, weary with their long night's labor, and hungry. The tender love of our Lord, who is waiting for them, has anticipated this. They find a fire kindled and food ready for them. "When therefore they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter: Simon son of John, lovest thou me more than these? He saith to him: Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith to him: Feed my lambs." This command, twice repeated, is clearly intended to convey the idea of a spiritual nourishment. The physical feeding, of which Christ has just been the Minister, was the sign that stood for an infinitely higher form of nourishment which the apostles and their successors were to give to the faithful entrusted to their care.

Years after this we catch an echo of the

The Sacrament of Friendship

Saviour's command in Peter's letter to the priests and people of the Church in Asia Minor. Addressing the former, the prince of the apostles says: "Feed the flock of God which is among you." Constantly the words of Christ spoken by the Sea of Galilee have been ringing in his ears. Very clearly do they declare what is the greatest duty of a priest's life; and almost innumerable are the direct and indirect references to this command of our Lord in the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church.

The second incident is that of which we have spoken before, i. e., the miraculous feeding of the multitude, an event which also took place on the hallowed shore of Genesareth. Here we see a more specific instruction. We have placed before us that particular form of nourishing the soul which was to take preeminence over all other forms.

When our Lord spoke His words of
136

Life of the Soul

promise, He had just fed the multitude with material food. That fact was fresh in the minds of His hearers. He wishes to take advantage of it to point out the necessity of a higher form of food. He speaks of the Manna, the holiest food of which they had any knowledge. Every Hebrew reverenced the memory of it. But even this, sacred as it is, is not sufficient for His purpose. “Your fathers did eat Manna in the desert and are dead.” The Manna of itself could not give them the higher life He wishes them to possess. But He will give them a different, an infinitely nobler form of nourishment—Himself. “I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever. And the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”

This, then, is the Food that is to support in a special, all-sufficient manner the fainting souls of men. The first supernatural

The Sacrament of Friendship

life is given to the soul by Baptism. When lost through mortal sin, it is restored by means of the sacrament of Penance. All the other sacraments increase it. But the ordinary, the permanently present and ever-accessible means of sustaining and increasing the life of sanctifying grace is the Holy Eucharist. Other sacraments convey this grace from God to man. Here it is God's Son who comes in Person, and thus coming, brings with Himself as God all strength and life and sweetness.

We can readily see the superiority of this form of nourishing the soul. Our appreciation is heightened when we consider the various ways by which It acts upon us. It was not without a purpose that our Blessed Lord took bread and wine as the sign of this Great Sacrament. The most ignorant person has some idea of the effect of this form of food and drink upon the body. It was our Lord's intention that thus by analogy we should learn,

Life of the Soul

faintly at least, the effects of heavenly food upon the soul.

Doubtless, also, it was with this end in view that He spoke of heavenly bread immediately after He had fed the multitude in the desert. Those who enjoyed His bounty on this occasion had been in danger of fainting with hunger before He fed them. Afterwards they were revived. The life that was in them was made active: their latent energies of body and mind were toned up and brought into play. They could now more readily overcome obstacles and face the future with interest, ambition and hope.

How well do these efforts of nourishment upon the body illustrate the effects of the action of the Blessed Sacrament upon the soul. The latter must have some supernatural life before our Lord will enter it. But that life is far from perfect, far from complete. Venial sin and a thousand imperfections hinder its move-

The Sacrament of Friendship

ment and contract its sphere of activity. The journey through the desert of daily life has weakened it. Perhaps days and weeks have gone by without any effort on our part to renew our forces. And let it be remembered that no one can hope to retain his spiritual life for any considerable period unless he make some effort to increase it. Without this effort he will inevitably slip back.

Thus, for example, we start the week with sanctifying grace in our souls. One actual grace after another is offered us. Let us say we neglect to cooperate with all of these; but, in spite of our carelessness, we reach the end of the week without having committed mortal sin. Consequently there is the same amount of sanctifying grace in our souls as there was at the beginning of the week. But how many venial sins have we committed! How many offers of new life have we rejected. The barriers that keep our precious de-

Life of the Soul

posit of supernatural life safe in our souls have been very appreciably weakened; and God alone knows how many more assaults of satan they will be able to withstand.

We receive Holy Communion; and lo! our Blessed Saviour, with the fulness of life, comes into our souls, builds up our weakened defences, steadies and strengthens our wavering wills, and, by the love that His presence inspires, makes us more energetic in His service and leads us to bring into fuller play and more perfect action those transcendent powers that supernatural life implies.

Now, with the Body of the Lord but newly brought into our hearts, we are strong with the strength of Him whose life we share. The future is far less fearful for us. And rightly so. For it is one of the certain effects of a devout reception of the Blessed Sacrament that temptations are more easily overcome and trials more cheerfully and more successfully borne.

The Sacrament of Friendship

We can see, in this connection, how deeply significant is the action of our Lord in selecting the eve of His passion and death as the time for giving to His apostles their First Holy Communion. The greatest trial of their lives is at hand. This present hour, the most glorious one they have ever known, is to be quickly followed by the deepest darkness they would ever be called upon to face. On the morrow the devil will have his best opportunity for launching his deadliest attack. They need help now more than ever; and the help is given them. For in the upper chamber on Holy Thursday night, they receive the most abundant outpouring of power their souls have ever felt. The Blessed Sacrament is given to them to help them face fear with fortitude, dispel the darkness of doubt with steadfast faith, and bear the burden of separation from the visible presence of their Saviour with true resignation.



THE APOSTLES' FIRST COMMUNION

Life of the Soul

At no time in our lives shall we be called upon to fight as fiercely the hidden powers of darkness as they fought. But the Source of victory for them is the Source of victory for us also. They triumphed because of the close moral union with Christ that had been so wonderfully perfected by Holy Communion. Whenever we triumph in our struggles it is for the same reason, because the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, entering into us, strengthen us against temptation and fall.

We can better understand this consoling truth when we study the action of the Blessed Sacrament upon the sources of sin. These are three: the world, the flesh and the devil. Against each of these there is a special action of the Blessed Sacrament in our souls. United so closely to Christ we see more vividly the vanities of the world. Satan's efforts to deceive us are less successful. The eyes of the soul, bathed in the light of God's presence,

The Sacrament of Friendship

have a clearer vision of evil and its dire results. Not alone is false and fleeting pleasure presented to us, but, acting as an antidote to this, there is in the soul of the devout communicant a more or less efficacious apprehension of the dread consequences of sin, consequences that are so vividly impressed upon us that they tend to neutralize the alluring aspect of those things that are forbidden by the law of God.

The danger of temptations that arise from the flesh is also diminished. For, in the words of the Catechism of Trent, “ It also restrains and suppresses the lusts of the flesh, for, whilst it inflames souls with the fire of charity, it of necessity extinguishes the ardor of concupiscence.”

As for the devil, the greatest cause of our temptations, it is plain that the presence in our souls of Him who triumphed over satan must of necessity be our greatest safeguard against the attacks of His

Life of the Soul

vanquished foe. And this effect continues even after the physical union with our Lord is succeeded by the moral union effected by love.

It is because of this wonderful preventive effect of the Blessed Sacrament that the Church urges us to receive Holy Communion in times of trial and temptation. Nor does she rest satisfied with advising and exhorting us to receive Holy Communion. She goes further, for there are occasions, notably the hour of death, when she commands us to receive, occasions when the obligation of receiving the Holy Eucharist is imperatively placed upon all who would secure their salvation and who have the opportunity of receiving.

The practice of the Church at all times clearly illustrates how highly she values the fortifying and preventive power of the Blessed Sacrament. No better example of this can be found than the custom of giving the Body and Blood of Christ to those

The Sacrament of Friendship

about to undergo martyrdom in the first ages of Christianity, lest perhaps, as the Catechism of Trent tells us, "they should be overcome by the severity of their sufferings and should fail in the saving conflict."

One can readily see that a soul thus strengthened against fall is by this very fact rendered less the slave of vicious habits, and thus advances toward sanctity. But we know that perfect sanctity is afar off, and that its attainment means not merely the process of putting off the old man, of pulling ourselves out of the dark and hideous habits of sin, but also of putting on the new man, of acquiring virtues, of perfecting ourselves in good habits.

The Body and Blood of our Blessed Lord gradually change the soul of the worthy communicant into the likeness of the One whom he receives. The life that is thus given to us is active as all life in its perfection must be. It ever moves onward

Life of the Soul

by its own impulse. Corporal food adds increase to the body; the Bread of Angels adds increase to the soul. In the soul are rooted the virtues that adorn the true Christian. Every increase of Sanctifying Grace through Holy Communion means a corresponding increase in the power of the virtues. As the growing life at the root of a plant pushes forth the tender shoot and sends upward the sustenance that brings out bud and blossom and fruit in all their beauty, so the new life that comes from the presence of Christ in our souls urges us to perform those acts, interior and exterior, that develop our virtues. It is true that not always do our outer lives correspond in beauty of word and work with the abundance of life that lies in our souls. It is too often the sad truth that many a budding virtue is blighted by lack of co-operation, and many a harvest of fair promise lies ungarnered for the future life. But we must remember that the process

The Sacrament of Friendship

of growth towards perfection is infinitely complex, and that, while a whole group of virtues may appear stunted in spite of Holy Communion, there are other groups less subject, perhaps, to observation, hidden away, as it were, in a far corner of the broad field of human activity. And these may be growing apace with a loveliness and power none the less real for all their obscurity.

A well-rounded character, one that is evenly developed, is ideal, it is true. But an appreciable growth in some phases of virtue, accompanied by a comparative, and perhaps merely temporary, lethargy in others, is surely a sign and an effect of increasing life in our souls.

The union we contract with our Lord is not perfect and complete this side of heaven. It must be our purpose to approach nearer and nearer to this perfect union by overcoming all the obstacles that stand in its way. The full stature, the

Life of the Soul

complete filling out of our soul's life will be reached in the state of blessedness hereafter. In the meantime the frequent and earnest communicant can feel with every certainty that his growth in virtue is a reality; that his soul is living with the life of God Himself, for it is Jesus Christ who tells him this: "He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me."

Daily the soul is transformed more and more into the likeness of its Saviour. The perfect character of the Perfect Man begins to appear in the soul of His lover. Very faintly at first; here quite hidden from sight; there, in one little spot, almost as clear as in the human soul of the God-Man; in other places only the outlines more or less distinct. But the likeness, as a whole, is unmistakable; and if we cannot enjoy the full and adequate and detailed reproduction, we can surely taste a heavenly happiness from the consciousness

The Sacrament of Friendship

that growth towards God is going on within us, and that perseverance will at last bring us to the full development that comes from a final, permanent union with the Source of everlasting Life in the world to come.

CHAPTER IX

SPIRITUAL SWEETNESS

Praesta meae menti de te vivere,
Et te illi semper dulce sapere.

Grant my soul the grace to live in Thee,
And ever have Thy sweetness for its own.

Most necessary is the petition we present to our Lord when we ask Him to give us the grace to draw our life from Him. For, as we know, there is no life save that which flows from the infinite abundance of the life of God. It is this life which is given us in greatest profusion in the Blessed Sacrament; and it is this Sacrament, therefore, that sustains and builds up and strengthens in the fullest possible manner the life of the soul.

But there is another effect of the reception of this Source of Life into our souls that we have not yet considered: and that is, a certain spiritual relish or sweetness

The Sacrament of Friendship

which accompanies and follows the reception of this Heavenly Food “ containing within itself all sweetness.” In order the better to understand what this is, let us again have recourse to the analogy of earthly food, and its effects on those consuming it.

Our Lord has said: “ My flesh is meat indeed.” That is, true food, in the fullest meaning of the word. Now it is natural for earthly food not only to build up the body, strengthen and fortify it against the effects of future physical effort, but also, at the same time, to be the source of a certain relish, so that a man enjoys his food, and feels a buoyancy and cheerfulness after a satisfying meal.

In the same way, transferring our idea to the higher sphere of spiritual food, we naturally would expect this food to effect in our souls all that bodily nourishment does for the body. So that we are not surprised to find a relish and sweet savor

Spiritual Sweetness

classed among the effects of Holy Communion.

We come still nearer to an adequate conception of this effect of the Blessed Sacrament when we study the action of Manna upon the Jews, for time and again is this Sacrament compared to the food so miraculously given to the wandering tribes in the desert. Concerning this type of the Eucharist, we are told very clearly that it not only strengthened, but also gladdened those who ate it: “Thou didst feed thy people with the food of angels, and gavest them bread from heaven, prepared without labor: having in it all that is delicious, and the sweetness of every taste.”

Let us bear in mind that in Holy Communion we receive the Divinity, as well as the Humanity, and that with the Divinity comes Divine Love, perfect and all-powerful, never inactive, ever energetic. So that not only are our souls strengthened in the state of grace, not only is the power

The Sacrament of Friendship

of pleasing God and working for Him and making acts of love for Him stored up in our souls, but this state of grace is impelled to motion, and the power to please and love is strongly drawn towards action. To possess power and to use it are, as we know, two entirely different things. As a result of Holy Communion, then, we have not only an increase in the amount of power in our souls, but also an actual use of this power, in so far as the Communicant cooperates with the graces he receives more abundantly at this time than at any other.

Truly, in Holy Communion “the charity of Christ presseth us,” the love of our Blessed Lord present in our souls urges us by one actual grace after another to use the power of action that we have stored up within us in such abundance. There must be some response to this powerful and continuous pressure brought to bear upon the soul.

Spiritual Sweetness

It is this Divine Love itself, acting within us at the time of Holy Communion, and afterwards, that constitutes the source of the delight and relish that form an effect of the Blessed Sacrament. Some response is met with in our souls; some of the power of love given to us is transformed to the action of love, and this movement of the soul towards God makes us taste and see how sweet the Lord is.

Although this sweetness and relish are only secondary, and not of primary importance, they are in practice probably the most esteemed and sought after by the great majority of communicants. This condition prevails not because we do not value at its proper relative worth the strengthening of the soul that comes from Holy Communion, but because we are human beings and are prone to lose sight of the more subtle, but none the less important, effects, in our desire to enjoy the sweetness its reception has the power

The Sacrament of Friendship

to give us. Somehow this latter appeals to us more than the others, perhaps because it is more perceptible.

It is just here that we find the occasion of much worry. The idea most people have of sweetness and relish is so intimately connected in their lives with the idea of feeling, that they find it most difficult to separate the two, and thus see the possibility of a real relish existing independently of their feelings. Yet, if they do not take the latter view, they leave themselves open to all sorts of temptations to discouragement, and possibly may come to abandon the practice of frequent communion altogether.

They complain that they no longer feel delight when they receive; that they cannot feel any love for our Saviour even at the most sacred moment when His body comes into their own. They have felt—as every one does to a greater or less extent—in some of their former Communions

Spiritual Sweetness

the sweetness of the Lord's presence. Then their emotions had been strongly influenced; perhaps their experience came near to ecstasy. All this is now gone, but the memory of it is still present; and they use it as their standard of judgment. Unless they experience a repetition of their former exalted feelings, they are discouraged.

This discouragement is seized upon by satan as a good opportunity to tempt them to abstain from receiving our Lord. He whispers into their ear that God is no longer pleased with them; nay more, that they are actually doing a serious wrong in daring to receive Him in their present dispositions; that the effects of Holy Communion must always include the emotion of joy, and since this latter effect is not present in their hearts, they are receiving unworthily. Clever sophistry, truly, but easily exposed!

Let the one who is thus sorely tried—

The Sacrament of Friendship

and it is indeed a sore trial, and one that calls for patient treatment—let such a one reason calmly with himself. Let him seek the true idea of spiritual sweetness, if he has not been told of it already. And he will find his answer, the solution of his difficulty, in the clear-cut explanation of theology.

In the first place, this effect is not primary, but secondary, and although our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament always possesses the power to produce it in the communicant, its actual production may be impeded by the dispositions of the one who receives. If, for example, at the time of Holy Communion, we are distracted by other thoughts than those we should have, and thus do not attend to the presence of our Lord, we naturally suffer a lessening of this effect. Or, to take other cases, suppose the body is suffering from physical pain, or the heart is weighed down by some anxious care or deadening sorrow: it is

Spiritual Sweetness

most likely that these will more or less monopolize our feelings, and leave them little chance to be influenced by, and to reflect, the movements stirred up by our Lord in the higher faculties of our soul.

In the second place, we must keep in mind what is a logical inference from the preceding explanation: that this spiritual sweetness does not depend upon the feelings, is not necessarily perceptible by the senses, but essentially rests in the will. Many times it does overflow into the feelings, and thus gives us an exalted sensation of happiness. But this is outside its necessary sphere of action.

We are to look for this effect, therefore, not in our feelings, but in our will. Not by ecstatic longing, not by a delicious thrilling of the heart with sensible joy, not by tears and sighs, are we to judge finally and in every case whether we have tasted the sweetness of the Lord or not. For these are, on the whole, given but rarely, and

The Sacrament of Friendship

sometimes given not as a recognition of increased spiritual vigor, but rather as a loving help to a weak child of God who needs some special marks of predilection lest he faint by the way.

Those who do not feel the presence of God in this sensible, emotional manner need not be alarmed. They belong to the great body of our Lord's faithful followers who are expected to fight bravely forward without, as a rule, receiving very many consolations of this kind, and who are looked upon by God as strong enough to persevere in their reception of the Bread of Angels without being given the tenderer delicacies reserved, on the one hand, for the less robust; and on the other, though of course, in a far higher degree, for some of His most generous servants like St. Stanislaus, and St. Theresa, during the latter part of her life, and St. Juliana, who were so remarkably favored in this regard.

Let the rank and file of the host of the

Spiritual Sweetness

adorers of the Blessed Sacrament be satisfied with the thought that their wills are being made stronger and more prompt to do the will of God; that the pursuit of His interests is becoming easier and more acceptable to them. And of this they will not, perhaps, be conscious at all times. But let a serious crisis come into their lives, let them be confronted by an unusual temptation, and they will then realize that they have been gathering latent strength with every Holy Communion, and have been steadily perfecting a relish for the things of God which has become so strong and predominant that now, when they are confronted by the trial that involves a choice between evil and good, between creature and Creator, the soul's acquired relish for heavenly sweetness is a wonderful help to them in choosing the good and rejecting that which savors of sin and satan.

That sin has become less attractive to them may not be apparent until these great

The Sacrament of Friendship

soul-testing trials occur. But when they do occur, the ever-growing relish for the Food of Angels acts as a powerful check upon the lower inclinations that otherwise might have run away with the will and plunged it into serious sin with comparative ease.

We see this gradual and steady growth in our spiritual appetite much more clearly when we look back over the struggles and triumphs of our past life. Looking forward, or trying to concentrate our mind upon our present fitness for a decisive conflict, we are not quite sure of ourselves, we find it hard to see that we have any greater relish for God's interests now than we had a year or more ago. It is difficult to analyze and measure our state of growth and preparedness.

Looking back, however, each one of us can see that there have been events in our lives, great trials and great temptations passed through successfully, that we

Spiritual Sweetness

dreaded by anticipation, and of whose final happy outcome we had the gravest doubts. And when it was all over, how often have we said to ourselves: “ I do not see how I managed to do this or that, how I succeeded in fighting off that most alluring and powerful temptation, or in resigning myself so piously to the loss of my dear friend, my father, or mother, or son or daughter.” In the case of the earnest communicant, the explanation of this is not hard to find. It was the strength of God stored up in his soul, and the relish for the things of God, that gave him the final victory.

All, then, who receive Holy Communion devoutly need have no fear that they are not growing in a relish for the things of God. And it is well to bear in mind that to receive devoutly does not imply the devotion of a saint. It is, of course, the ideal to be aimed at, but who is there who can in practice command a saint-like recollec-

The Sacrament of Friendship

tion, and approach the altar with heart and mind concentrated as they should be upon our Lord?

No, our Saviour does not demand this. He makes allowance for human weakness, and rewards honest effort with so abundant an outpouring of His grace and sweetness that we all may safely presume on a steady increase, not only in the stored-up energy of grace in our souls, but also in the strength of our relish and desire for this Heavenly Food.

But preparation is necessary; and an earnest effort must be made to concentrate our attention upon our Lord, and keep inactive for the time being those legitimate affections that, it goes without saying, need not be rooted out from our hearts. It is important for us to remember that failure to attempt this phase of preparation for Holy Communion, as well as failure to avoid, or to seek the remission of, venial sins, will diminish the spiritual relish im-

Spiritual Sweetness

parted by the reception of our Lord. But such failures on our part will not nullify the effects of the Blessed Sacrament by making our reception of It an unworthy one.

As we know, this Sacrament, like all the others, produces its effects “*ex opere operato*,” that is, by its own operation. We need only be in the state of grace to be benefited by it. So that if we do nothing save keep away the only obstacle—mortal sin—we shall infallibly receive fruit from our Holy Communion. But who would be satisfied with this half-hearted, inactive appreciation of our Lord’s Real Presence? Who would be so utterly careless of the infinite possibilities contained in only one Holy Communion, as to limit his preparation to the avoiding of serious sin and its proximate occasions?

Here on the altar, soon to be my guest, is the Lord of all love and of all power and knowledge. My heart is the home He

The Sacrament of Friendship

is to visit in a very few minutes. Shall I not see to it, in so far as I am able, that every slightest spot is washed away from this Divinely-chosen dwelling-place; that every one of its servants, my senses and the faculties of my soul, performs but a single duty—that of awaiting Christ's coming in earnest, respectful expectation? And shall not I, His host, not only meet my Heavenly Visitor and conduct Him into the guest-chamber of my soul, but stay with Him and entertain Him?

By so acting shall I receive the fullest measure of sanctifying grace, and experience the peace and serenity, the inclination to good and the greater readiness for the practice of virtue that are the characteristic evidences that I possess that sweetness of God which I earnestly beg Him to grant me for all eternity.

CHAPTER X

A CLEAN HEART

Pie pellicane Jesu, Domine,
Me immundum munda tuo sanguine.

O loving pelican, O Jesu, Lord,
Cleanse Thy unclean servant with Thy blood.

An ancient belief has ascribed to the Pelican—a large web-footed bird having a pouch attached to a bill of unusual size—the custom of piercing her breast with her bill that she might feed her young with the blood thus brought forth. Christian symbolism has taken over this touching, but fabulous, tradition and makes use of the Pelican as a type of the infinitely tender love of our Blessed Lord who, not in fable but in fact, has suffered Himself to be wounded unto death, in order that His Blood thus poured forth might nourish us unto life everlasting.

The Sacrament of Friendship

The presence of this reference to the Pelican in the prayer of Saint Thomas to our Eucharistic Lord brings forcibly to our minds, by a natural and close inference, the fact of our inherent frailty, and absolute dependence upon the sin-destroying Blood of Jesus Christ.

This Precious Blood of our Blessed Redeemer has, therefore, a double relation: one with life and the other with death. Not alone does it increase sanctifying grace in our souls and bring into activity our latent love for God, but it goes deeper than this. In Holy Communion it presupposes the existence of life in the soul; but, as applied to us in Baptism and Penance, it deals directly with death, destroys its effects, and either gives the first deposit of the life of grace or restores this life when it has been lost through mortal sin. So it is the ultimate, the only source of life. Without it we could not be in the necessary state for receiving Holy Communion.

Clean Heart

Thus we depend absolutely upon its application to our souls.

How deeply ought we to be touched by this evidence of our Lord's love for us! Here in the Host that we adore, the Blood is actually present together with the Body that contains it. Here every beat of the Sacred Heart sends forth that Precious Blood to wash the world from sin, and give us in place of sin the all-powerful means to avoid future falls and to build up the life of grace in our souls.

At the thought of this stupendous act of all-embracing love, we are filled with a clearer perception of our utter unworthiness. Here we see, amongst other things, of what immense advantage it is for every Catholic, whether he be in mortal sin or not, to visit the Blessed Sacrament and meditate upon the infinite value of the Blood of Christ, and the various benefits that flow from it.

If he be not in mortal sin, the thought

The Sacrament of Friendship

of the power of the Precious Blood, and of the loving desire of our Lord to use it in cleansing even the slightest stain from our souls, will naturally cause him to dwell upon those venial sins of which he is guilty, will fill him with a hatred of them and a desire to make himself more worthy of his Saviour's love by removing them. Sorrow will lay hold upon him, and acts of contrition will rise in his heart. And thus, without the sacrament of Penance, he will be able to seek and obtain pardon for his venial sins.

This is one inestimable opportunity we should embrace whenever we visit the church, and, of course, whenever we receive Holy Communion. Let us never forget, when God is so near to us on the altar, or actually in our souls, to beg His forgiveness for the slightest sin of which we may be guilty.

While a man in mortal sin dare not receive our Lord, there is no reason why he

Clean Heart

should not visit Him; in fact, there is the best of reasons for so doing, if he earnestly dwell upon the cleansing power of the Blood of Christ present in the tabernacle. He may feel no devotion at all; he may be overwhelmed by the memory of his iniquitous conduct; he may not have the slightest desire to go to Confession; he may even think that there is no hope for him. But let him bring himself to go into some church and kneel before the altar, saying only the words: "My God, I believe that Thou art present on the altar, that Thou seest me, a miserable sinner unworthy to be here," and the first movements towards pardon are begun. Let him seize the help that is now being given him, and soon his heart that had become hardened and had been sinking into the depths of despair, will be softened by sorrow and lifted to love.

Perhaps the thought of past innocence, of days long since gone by, when mortal sin was a stranger to his heart, will come

The Sacrament of Friendship

flashing before his mind. And now he feels a longing to receive, in the fullest possible measure, the benefits of the Precious Blood. He wishes to give his heart, his life, himself to his God. But first, as he well knows, he must seek pardon at the appointed place. He must go to Confession. And thither he goes to bathe in the abundance of the Blood of his Blessed Lord, coming forth with his soul cleansed to the whiteness of the driven snow.

Now he may come to the altar and give his acceptable gift of love in exchange for the Sacred Body of Christ with all the life-giving Blood that rests within it. Thus a wonderful miracle has been worked in his soul. He has gone to the altar of God in his sins. There has he been moved by the nearness of the Divine Presence to offer himself as a gift to his Maker. But he knew that his Friend on the altar (to change slightly the words of the Gospel) had something against him. So he heeded

Clean Heart

the Voice of reproach that spoke in his heart, and went first to be reconciled with his God in the sacrament of Penance. And then coming he offered his gift, this time receiving the infinite reward.

So easy of access is the sacrament of Penance, so gentle and beseeching is the voice of Christ calling the unrepentant sinner to receive through it the pardon necessary to prepare him for Holy Communion, and so awful is the very thought of daring to receive our Lord in the state of mortal sin, that it would seem hardly possible that such a horrible sacrilege as an unworthy Communion could ever be committed.

And yet, the danger is just as real to-day as it was when Saint Paul spoke his terrible words of warning: “ Whosoever shall eat this bread or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself: and so let him eat of

The Sacrament of Friendship

that bread and drink of the chalice. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord."

Awful as is the thought embodied in these words, and real as is the danger of receiving unworthily, it must be noted, especially by timorous souls, that in practice, when a Catholic is in the habit of confessing and receiving frequently and with a normal amount of care and earnestness, he need have little or no fear of committing this sacrilege. People of this kind need be no more disturbed over the words of Saint Paul just quoted, than they are over the denunciation of other serious sins that are frequently given in Sacred Writ. They hear and meditate upon most or all of these, and the warnings thus given sink into their souls and become part of them, forming fixed principles that guide their conduct, springing spontaneously to the surface of their memories to serve as

Clean Heart

strong checks whenever they stand in any danger of falling.

A reasonable dread of making a sacrilegious Communion is quite proper. But this dread must not be constantly in evidence, obtruding itself, as it were, upon our spiritual life, and dampening our ardor. In a word, it should be a habit present in the soul and guiding it almost automatically, but hidden for the most part, only to be dwelt upon briefly and at occasional moments in our lives.

Certainly every Confession and Holy Communion removes further from the life of an earnest Catholic the danger of committing any serious sin. And this is especially true of the danger of making a bad Communion. For the spiritual relish and constantly growing activity of love, that result from our union with Christ in Holy Communion, are, very naturally, even more effective in guarding us against an unworthy reception of our Lord, than against

The Sacrament of Friendship

other snares that satan sets for our downfall, no matter how dangerous these latter may be.

We might say that, in one sense, the first and most important function fulfilled by the ever-active presence of Jesus within us is precisely to strengthen us against falling into the crime of receiving the Blessed Sacrament in the state of mortal sin. Surely we can leave something to the infinite power and love of our Saviour.

For those who go but rarely to Confession and Holy Communion, the danger we speak of is more real, because, to give only one reason, there is less spiritual power in their lives to resist temptation. But even in this case, the unspeakable heinousness of a sacrilegious Communion has been so vividly impressed upon their minds, and their hearts are so possessed by the horror of it, that very rarely is the sacrilege committed.

But it has been committed; and it is still

Clean Heart

possible to commit it. Lest, therefore, the possibility become actual, it is well for those who confess and receive infrequently to reflect more upon the danger than those who are more regular in their reception of the sacraments.

In the case of one who unhappily falls into this sin, the process that precedes the fall is quite similar to that which goes before other grave infractions of the law of God. Of course, in this case, there is no such thing as a venial stain, as there is, for example, in the sin of stealing, where a trifling matter essentially lessens the gravity. There is no gradual descent from a little sin of sacrilege to the full gravity of the crime. A man's Communion is either good or bad, either fruitful or mortally sinful.

But for all that there is a process, a more or less gradual descent to the depths of an unworthy Communion. A growing lack of appreciation of the nature and infinite

The Sacrament of Friendship

dignity of the Blessed Sacrament, a gradually increasing carelessness in our preparation for its reception, the partial or even entire absence of any serious effort to keep before our minds the fact that it is God whom we are receiving: these are sign-posts that line the road to a sacrilegious reception of the Holy Eucharist.

Side by side with these we discern symptoms that are more obviously connected with Confession: a culpable carelessness in the act of recalling sins we have committed, a persistent effort to excuse ourselves when we come for judgment before the tribunal of our own conscience, a deadening of this conscience, or the entire elimination of it in the case of certain sins, and the substitution of a false conscience more favorable to our inclinations.

Multiply and intensify some or all of these, and you can easily picture a man reaching such a condition of spiritual blindness and cowardice that a deep sense

Clean Heart

of shame and a foolish, unfounded fear will move him to conceal a mortal sin entirely, or so confess it that it appears, as he wishes it to appear, to be only a venial fault—and then the last step is taken; he has come to his journey's end. A sacrilegious Communion confronts him, unless, of course, he refrain from receiving while in this state of soul.

All during the process up to this point, every Communion has been worthy and has left some fruit, sadly ineffective, however, by reason of his own lack of cooperation, to restrain him from the awful sacrilege. And all this time, during the whole course of his gradual downfall, the heart of Jesus Christ has been throbbing with love for him, with a mighty love that knows no power in heaven or on earth strong enough to resist it, save the perversity of a human will which abuses the freedom and strength that God gave it to use for the purpose of meriting salvation.

The Sacrament of Friendship

The Blood of Christ was shed for this man as well as for others. For this man, too, has it been flowing through the Sacred Body hidden by the species of bread and wine, ever anxious to tear away by the torrent of its abundance the scales that carelessness and indifference to its presence had caused to grow upon the eyes of the soul. But the poor sinner would not put himself in its way. It has been so near to him in the confessional, waiting to deluge him with its saving flow when the words of contrite acknowledgment would reach his lips. But the words never came; and the pent-up flood was driven back to the sorrowing Heart of Jesus.

And now, even now when this wretched man, guilty of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, walks from the church and goes about his daily life, with the haunting spirits of Christ's executioners as his fitting companions, even now the Blood of his Master is waiting for him, as the Blessed

Clean Heart

Mother prays for him and saints intercede for him. Even now he has but to go back to the presence of his insulted Lord, and there before the Blessed Sacrament say again and again with a contrite heart: "Cleanse thy unclean servant with thy blood," and the Blood of Jesus, moving him to seek forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance, will finally wipe away his sin forever.

Here has been reached, not the limit of the power of the Blood of Christ—for it has no limit, since it is the Blood of God—but one of the most wonderful manifestations of its power that we could imagine. For here it has been used to wipe away the triple sin of profanation, of treason, and of deicide. For those who communicate sacrilegiously profane the Body of our Lord, receiving It as if It were ordinary food; are traitors to our Lord as Judas was; and, finally, crucify again the Son of God, in so far as their disposi-

The Sacrament of Friendship

tions of soul are concerned. Truly the mercy of the Lord is beyond measure, and the power of His Precious Blood knows no bounds.

Let us not, in thus meditating upon the sin of a sacrilegious Communion, lose sight of its most far-reaching lesson in our absorption in that which, after all, strikes home to but a very few. Let us not, by reason of fear and trembling, forget the infinite benefits bestowed upon man by the Blood of Christ, and think only of the possibility, and the rarely occurring fact, of the forfeiture of these benefits.

In the Blessed Sacrament is the Blood of Jesus, and this Blood is ever at our disposal, whether we seek its application to ourselves at the Fountain-head, the Holy Eucharist, or through the other sacraments acting as channels. Daily we may receive it in its fulness in Holy Communion, and thus grow stronger and stronger by reason

Clean Heart

of this repeated outpouring of the power of God into our souls.

When the acceptance of this privilege of daily Communion is not practicable for us, we can at least make spiritual Communions and thus receive some measure of the fruits of actual Communion. And it is often in our power to visit the Blessed Sacrament, and there in His presence beg our Lord to apply His Precious Blood to us and wash away the lesser stains that need not the sacrament of Penance. Thus may our hearts be made purer and better prepared for the hallowed moment of our next Holy Communion.

CHAPTER XI

THE POWER OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

Cujus una stilla salvum facere
Totum mundum quit ab omni scelere.

Of which a single drop hath strength to save
From all its wickedness the entire world.

The Catechism of the Council of Trent teaches us that the Holy Eucharist “ truly and of necessity is to be called the fount of all graces, since it contains within itself in a wonderful manner the very source of heaven’s gifts and special favors, and the Author of all the sacraments, Christ the Lord from whom as from a source flow into the other sacraments all the goodness and perfection they possess.” (p. 2, c. 4, n. 48.)

The Blessed Sacrament is, therefore, in a very real sense the cause of our supernatural life, the source of all the things

Power of the Precious Blood

that are of permanent value, whether they be obtained through the reception of Holy Communion, or through the other sacraments, or through prayer in one or other of its various forms. All that is of eternal value in our lives comes from this Source because the Blessed Sacrament is Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine, and Jesus Christ is God.

This thought is so overwhelming in its immensity, in its numberless and far-reaching implications, that the mind of man is completely helpless in its effort to grasp it in its entirety. It is necessary for us to approach as closely as we can to the root of this great truth, and there concentrate our feeble faculties, relying upon God's help for light and strength.

The comprehensive fact so clearly enunciated by the Council of Trent rests upon the fundamental truth that man, having fallen from a state of friendship with God, and being utterly unable of himself to re-

The Sacrament of Friendship

establish the vital relationship that he formerly possessed, was given the opportunity to restore it by the Son of God made Man, who offered Himself as a Victim that He might reunite man with his Maker.

This constituted the Atonement, by reason of which the means were offered to man for the removal of all the obstacles that had hitherto effectually opposed his efforts to become spiritually one with His God. And the result was that, after our Blessed Lord had finished His work on earth, it became possible for each one of us to resume and retain the state of friendship with God in time and eternity.

In order to bring this all-important truth a little nearer to the grasp of our intellects, let us try to obtain some idea of how our Lord did this. His plan for our Redemption embraced two main elements: the internal act of the will by which He offered Himself to His Father as a Victim

Power of the Precious Blood

for our sins; and the external act, or, rather, series of acts, which was dictated by His will, and which gave to the world in the fullest possible manner the evidence of His complete submission to His Father. Being God as well as Man, His acts as Man had a value that came from His Divine Personality. Therefore, the act of His Human will, and the sufferings that this act brought upon His Sacred Body, were of divine, that is, immeasurable worth, and were thus made acceptable and fully satisfactory in the sight of His Father.

When we speak of our Saviour's Sacrifice, we often refer to it as the shedding of His Blood. And in so doing we follow the example of Sacred Scripture. This way of putting it makes it less difficult for us to grasp the thought of our Blessed Lord redeeming us.

We have, then, emerging from the infinite depths of Divine Redemption, and in a certain sense carrying with it, as in a

The Sacrament of Friendship

kernel, the whole vast and astounding and infinitely complex scheme of Salvation, an idea that makes it all much more intelligible to our minds, so pitifully dependent as they are upon something concrete to give substance and stability to our thought: and that idea is expressed in many places in the New Testament as our Redemption through the Blood of Christ.

Take, for example, St. Paul to the Colossians: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the remission of sins," and "Because in him it hath well pleased the Father, that all fulness should dwell: and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, making peace through the blood of the cross." Also in the epistle to the Romans we find the same reference. Speaking of our Lord, St. Paul here says: "Whom God hath proposed to be a propitiation through faith in his blood."

Thus, to take only these three texts, we see that the remission of sins, not alone the

Power of the Precious Blood

sin of Adam, the original obstacle to man's salvation, but all the sins that ever have been, or will be, remitted, is due to the Blood of Christ; that whenever the enmity and disorder, which exist as an inevitable result of sin, are displaced by a state of love and peace, this wonderful change is effected by our Lord through "the blood of his cross;" and, finally, that it is by faith in his Blood—an efficacious faith—that we share in the fruits of the Redemption, and have our hope of happiness realized.

And this Blood of our Lord, so comprehensive in its latent power, and so effective when we permit this power to be applied to us, is present on our altars. Here, then, is one very obvious and simple reason why St. Thomas refers so lovingly to the Precious Blood in his prayer to the Blessed Sacrament. And in order to heighten our appreciation of the immeasurable value of this Blood, and also to show the prodigality

The Sacrament of Friendship

of God's love for us, he tells us that one drop alone has power to wipe away a world's iniquity; one drop alone " hath strength to save from all its wickedness the entire world."

This we can readily understand from what we know of the source of its power, the Godhead of Jesus Christ. Just one act of the God-Man acquires an infinite value by reason of the union of the Human and Divine Natures of our Lord. It was God's plan, however, to save man, not by the performance of a single act, the shedding of one drop of blood, for example, although this would have been perfectly possible, but by a life of repeated sacrifices, ending on Calvary.

Thus the generosity of God that planned the Vindication of His Justice, is constantly and lavishly coloring both the continuous Satisfaction of a thirty-three years' life-time, and also the continuous application of the fruits of this Satisfac-

Power of the Precious Blood

tion through all the generations of man. Not one drop alone is poured upon our souls, but all the life-blood of the Saviour. Not one drop alone was shed during the Passion, but every wound gave its fresh share, until at last the soldier pierced the Heart of the dead Victim and drew forth the final flow that separated entirely the Blood of Jesus from His Body.

And here again, in the Real Presence, we see the same prodigality of affection. What our Lord does here He does as divinely as on the cross. He gives us, not alone the single drop that of itself hath strength to save, but every drop that flows in His sacred veins. He offers up to His Father in heaven, in this Memorial of His death, not merely a Satisfaction that is sufficient, but one that superabounds, that is as an immense ocean of atonement, each drop of which carries with it an all-sufficient power to perfect man unto salvation.

But there are certain conditions which

The Sacrament of Friendship

we ourselves must fulfil before the Blood of our Lord can be efficaciously applied to our souls. The gifts of God are not thrust upon us, and the Divine power does not force itself into our souls, against our wills, or without our expressed or implied request. We must ask our Lord for a share in His atonement. And this petition is not to be made with a single eye to what we hope to receive, and no care whether we do our part or not.

When we seek the infinite benefits of the Blood of our Lord, we must do so with the realization that we, too, have a certain part in the Passion and Death that gave so unspeakable a power to the Precious Blood. We must remember that only those who suffer with Christ are worthy to share in the fruits of His suffering. As St. Paul puts it: "And if sons, heirs also: heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ: yet so if we suffer with him, that we be also glorified with him."

Power of the Precious Blood

Compared to the sufferings of Christ, our sufferings, our penances, etc., sink into insignificance. But they are essential conditions, and when we place them, they share at once in the infinite value of the Atonement, and open up the flood-gates of our souls through which pours the saving torrent of the Blood of Jesus.

These sufferings of ours which, in one form or another, we must offer as a necessary part in the work of our salvation through the Blood of Christ, include, in their broadest sense, the patient endurance of mental and physical pain, the voluntary acts of mortification that are, to some extent at least, necessary for each of us, the sorrow for sin, the avoidance of its proximate occasions—what a prolific source of pain this is—and, in general, the use of prayer which certainly involves quite a good deal of sacrifice. All of this implies effort, and it is the greater or less degree of perfection characterizing this effort

The Sacrament of Friendship

which has much to do with the extent of the benefit we gain from the application of the Precious Blood to our souls.

In view of this very practical truth, it should be one of our principal duties in our relations with the Blessed Sacrament to place as perfectly as possible the conditions necessary for Its free action in our souls, in other words, to prepare well for Its reception. For it is Holy Communion, as we know, that brings the Blood of Christ in greatest abundance into our souls; and the presence in them of the lesser obstacles to Its operation is consequently of greater significance than in the case of the reception of the other sacraments.

It is well right here to bring before our minds the fact that the Blessed Sacrament is the highest and most fruitful manifestation of God's love for man, the most perfect expression of friendship that could be imagined. Here is the continuation of the noblest act a Friend could perform—

Power of the Precious Blood

the sacrifice of Himself. But friendship is a relationship between two friends; and it is of the essence of friendship that it be based upon a certain intercourse between the friends. It demands something from each one. If we wish to be friends of our Lord in the full sense, we must be something more than passive recipients of His bounty. We must give love for love. We must offer Him, as His home, a heart purified by our thought of Him and by our sacrifices for His interests. When we visit Him, we should bear this fact in mind, and strive to make our visit an important part of our preparation for our next Holy Communion.

It is hardly necessary to say that the great obstacle that blocks entirely the entrance of our Lord into our souls, i. e., mortal sin, must be removed by the sacrament of Penance. This sacrament, therefore, is an essential part of the preparation in the case of one who is not already

The Sacrament of Friendship

in the state of grace. Penance also removes venial sins, but in practice we are not—and in fact need not be—very exact in recalling and confessing all our venial sins. To attempt this would, in most cases, involve us in a very long and tiring process of self-examination. But we can very readily have these sins wiped away by making acts of love and contrition, by using the sacramentals, and especially by means of visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

In the matter of removing lesser stains, we know that one of the effects of a fervent reception of our Lord is to burn away by the fire of love the venial blemishes that mar the soul. Thus it is that a devout Holy Communion may be made the best part of our preparation for the next reception of the Blessed Sacrament.

Many communicants, especially those afflicted with spiritual dryness, are often worried about what they term the absence or weakness of a desire to receive our

Power of the Precious Blood

Lord. Here again we find an undue emphasis placed upon the feelings. Because they cannot feel a strong inclination to receive, people of this kind believe that their preparation is defective.

For these we must point out the important truth that the desire required for a devout reception is an inclination of the will. This alone is essential. And we know from our experience that the will often reaches out for something without any accompanying emotion of love for the thing sought. Indeed, it often seeks its object in spite of the inclinations of feeling which strive to turn it to some less valuable, or perhaps positively dangerous, object.

Not only is the absence of a feeling of love perfectly consistent with the presence of a strong desire to receive Holy Communion, but it often has the effect of making the desire more meritorious in the sight of God, because the soul thus acting must

The Sacrament of Friendship

make a greater effort than the one that is carried along by the strong rush of affection.

If the person thus deprived of sensible attraction to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament would only weigh well this consoling truth, he would avoid a great deal of anxiety. But, unfortunately, he often rejects this reasonable solution of his problem, and turns in another direction in his efforts to acquire the unessential help of the feelings in his preparation for Holy Communion. He attributes his dryness to the presence of some unforgiven sin on his soul. He has but the vaguest notions of what this sin might be. But his state of mind demands the discovery of some serious sin. To himself his reasoning is conclusive: "I have no desire to receive. This is God's way of telling me that I am not worthy to receive. But mortal sin alone can make me unworthy. Therefore, I am in the state of mortal sin." And thus

Power of the Precious Blood

harrowed by an unfounded fear he searches his soul, and uses up in doing this an immense amount of time and energy that could have been so profitably spent in a real preparation.

And not only does he lose this time and energy, but his conduct actually decreases his chance of stirring up the desire of feeling, for it occupies more and more exclusively those very founts of emotion from which he expects to derive the assistance of sensible devotion. He fills with a chilling fear the heart that he wishes to inflame with the fervor of love.

How easily could he bring peace into his troubled conscience, if he would act upon the knowledge he surely must possess, if he would apply the principle we have given above, and also another principle that he now needs perhaps first of all, namely: that when he cannot free himself from doubt about past sins, especially when his doubt has resulted from such unreasonable

The Sacrament of Friendship

conduct as his has been, he is not obliged to make this doubt a matter of confession, and is urged to dismiss it at once from his mind.

He may not be conscious that he lacks a true appreciation of the power of the Blood of Christ, and the infinite pity that prompted the shedding of this precious Blood; but is it not true that lack of appreciation is the real cause of his needless anxiety? Does he not show his failure to grasp the full meaning of the Redemption when he is spiritually writhing in fear of the wrath of God, instead of resting securely in the enjoyment of that peace purchased for us “through the blood of the cross?” Let him throw himself unreservedly into the arms of Divine Mercy, and speak thus to his Lord:

“Here in the tabernacle, soon to touch my lips and pass into my soul to lave it with its blessed flow, is the Blood of my Redeemer. Many times in the past has it

Power of the Precious Blood

washed away the stains that daily contact with temptation and sin has left upon me. Its cleansing power has been perfect; far more abundant has been its presence than even I, wretched sinner as I am, have needed. The little that has been demanded from me has been given, grudgingly given and imperfectly, but Thy eyes of Mercy have overlooked its defects.

“ I dare not say, here in the presence of my Lord, that I have ever refused to show to the priest in confession any mortal stains blackening my heart, that he might, as God’s agent, wash them away with Thy Blood. But still, I have my misgivings. I cannot feel sure that I am in the state of grace. Forgive this uncertainty of mind which implies a lack of trust in the far-reaching effects of Thy Atonement.

“ I will go on in spite of it, because thou dost command me to do so through the voice of those who speak for Thee. I will receive Thee with full confidence in the

The Sacrament of Friendship

power of the Precious Blood to strengthen my will in the face of feeling, and to remove, when thou seest fit, the fear that now possesses me and tends to lessen my love for Thee, my Redeemer and my God.”

CHAPTER XII

UNION WITH OUR LORD

*Jesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio,
Oro, fiat illud, quod tam sitio:
Ut te revelata cernens facie,
Visu sim beatus tuae gloriae.*

Jesu, who now art hidden from my sight,
Grant what I so dearly do desire:
That contemplating Thee, Thy face unveiled,
My bliss may be Thy glory to behold.

To be united to our Lord, with the full enjoyment of His presence, and with absolutely no fear of fall from this high estate, constitutes the final and perfect happiness reserved for us in heaven. It is towards this that we strive, and for it our hearts are yearning with an inexpressible longing. It is true, we receive this same Lord in Holy Communion, and know that when we thus possess Him we have within us the Source of eternal happiness; but we are still travelers on the journey to our final

The Sacrament of Friendship

Goal. Weariness weighs us down; dangers press upon us; it is possible, after all, for us to falter and fall by the wayside. Our lack of confidence in God, our failure to cooperate fully with His plenteous graces accentuate this possibility.

And then, too, although we know that our Destination, the Divine Object of our daily efforts, lies before us; and that He who will constitute our supreme happiness comes often to visit and console us, we realize only too sadly that His entrancing beauty and all-satisfying perfection are hidden from our sight by the mists that lie about us in this valley of the shadow of death.

Visible to our eyes are only the bare outlines of the Mountain of God that lies before us, marking the limit of earthly endeavor, and holding its reward—the vision of the unveiled Glory of Jesus. But more than the faint indications of a full reality we cannot see. Only when we emerge from

Union of our Lord

the mists that now embrace us, will the brightness and entrancing beauty of our Destination be revealed in all their fulness. And yet, He who dwells on that Heavenly Height is always within reach, always responsive to our call, always quick to come from His Father's House to visit us—but, alas! ever hiding from our eyes the glory that transfigures Him.

Thus it is that, although we now possess the Real Presence; although Christ our Lord, the beloved Goal towards which we strive, is ever near to us; although in Holy Communion He is really united to us, nevertheless, we yearn for more, and pray all the harder for that perfect possession which can come only when a happy death will have dispelled the clouds that now hide His glory, and driven away in utter defeat all the dangers that now threaten to dissolve our union with Jesus before it reaches its lasting and full perfection in heaven.

The Sacrament of Friendship

This present union which results from the reception of the Blessed Sacrament, although it is perfected only when we see our Lord face to face in heaven, is, for all that, a real union, and fundamentally just the same as the union with God in the life to come. The words of our Lord Himself reveal this wonderful truth: “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath everlasting life,” and: “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him.”

In the former text, let us take special notice of the present tense of the verb, to have. Our Lord does not say “will have,” but “hath,” that is, he who receives Holy Communion, at and from that very moment, has, truly possesses, everlasting life. He may lose it later on; it does not give him at once the full fruits that come only in heaven, namely, the sight of the unveiled face of God; but he does possess, by a real union, the same Jesus who is Eternal

Union of our Lord

Life. The latter part of the second, and parallel, text quoted above indicates what is the foundation of this “everlasting life:” “He (that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood) abideth in me, and I in him.” He who possesses “everlasting life” lives with Jesus and Jesus lives with him.

This union has two phases, one of quite brief duration, and the other outlasting the former and remaining permanently in force unless mortal sin dissolves it. The former is more easily understood, and has, partly on this account, a very strong appeal. It is a substantial and physical abiding of Christ within us. He gives Himself to us, truly and really, in flesh and blood. And we, truly and really, take His Body into our bodies. There He is united to us so closely that it is only the appearances of bread that separate our flesh from His.

This physical presence lasts until these species become changed, yielding to the

The Sacrament of Friendship

natural operations of the body. The time occupied by it varies. At most it is only a few minutes. But, until the process is finished, we enjoy the blessed privilege of bearing about with us the true Body and Blood of Jesus.

Within us are the adorable Feet that bore the good news of salvation tirelessly over the streets of Jerusalem, and the hill-sides and fields and country roads of Palestine. Here, too, are the Hands that were raised in benediction over the sick, the lame and the blind and the heart-weary poor who sought solace for their misery. Here are the Lips that spoke words of pardon and cure to the poor paralytic, that lovingly chided St. Peter, and framed the tenderest messages of mercy for mankind. And the Sacred Heart is present, also, with its ever-burning love for us, and with the lance wound wide open for the Precious Blood to come forth and deluge our souls with its unspeakable delights.

Union of our Lord

While this physical union lasts, we are, in a very real sense, the tabernacles of the Blessed Sacrament. The same Host that a few moments before rested in the tabernacle is in our bodies now. Our Lord, newly-received by a worthy communicant, is just as truly the object of our adoration as He is on the altar, or in the Monstrance. Not that it would be prudent to give external marks of this adoration when we meet one who has just received Holy Communion. But the fact remains that Christ's Body and Blood are really and substantially before us.

On very special occasions, a few times during the year, the Blessed Sacrament is carried in procession through the church. But every Sunday, every day, in fact, this same Lord is brought from the altar-rail to the pews by hundreds of communicants who thus, in this silent and undemonstrative manner, exercise the privilege of the priest who carries the Blessed Sacrament

The Sacrament of Friendship

publicly and apparelled in proper vestments, but no more really than the lowliest lay-person who receives our Lord in Holy Communion.

The physical union with our Saviour is a fruitful source of the truest consolation and most delightful satisfaction, but we must remember that it is not permanent. Nor is it, therefore, so important as the purely spiritual union that lasts after it has disappeared. It is true, this spiritual and permanent union is brought about by, and founded upon, the reception of our Lord and the resulting brief, but real and physical, union between His Body and Blood and ours. But the physical contact between the two ceases, as we have seen, when, after a few moments, the sacramental species lose their natural properties.

Thus it is that for the immensely greater portion of our lives on earth we are dependent upon the union that perdures when the Body and Blood of Christ cease to be

Union of our Lord

within us. Just what the nature of this union is, it is not easy to explain. Neither Christ's Body nor His Soul, neither His Humanity nor His Divinity, remains within us. But there is another kind of union besides that based upon physical presence and contact. It is called a moral union, and the bonds that bind the persons concerned, and thus form the union, are spiritual, depending for their power entirely upon the soul and its influence.

Of this nature is the permanent union between our Lord and the one who receives Him in Holy Communion. Here the Divine Person, Jesus Christ, is united with the communicant by the bond of charity—a spiritual power that knows no limits of time and space, that can stretch even into infinity and strain together the eager souls of those who love one another. To increase that charity which thus forms the basis of this moral union, is the special purpose of the Blessed Sacrament; and the principal

The Sacrament of Friendship

effect, therefore, of the reception of Holy Communion is to fan into a flame the latent love that lies in the soul.

The reception of our Lord's Body and Blood not only effects the permanent, spiritual union, but also admirably signifies it. For we know that this adorable Flesh is physically united to ours, and brief as is Its stay, it is sufficiently long to indicate most clearly the permanent part of our lives that is formed by the Life of Christ.

Coming into contact with our own body, touching the uttermost recesses of our being, His Sacred Body and Blood prepare us, as it were, to be more responsive and worthier recipients of the special and most abundant help we are henceforth entitled to receive. By His blessed presence, Jesus sanctifies in a wonderful manner both the body and the soul, and signs them with the spiritual insignia borne only by those who receive the Holy Eucharist.

And thus having made us His own

Union of our Lord

brothers in a unique sense, having taken us unto Himself and placed us under His special protection, He withdraws from physical contact with us. No longer are His Body and Blood within our bodies. But who can say that a change has not taken place within us? A very real change that is brought to pass by the temporary presence of our Lord; that makes him who receives Holy Communion for the first time the term of a new relationship with his Saviour; and that forms a firmer and more fruitful basis for this relationship with every fresh reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

Our Saviour will have more care for the body and soul of those whom He has blessed with this union. They are His in a sense quite different from, and much higher than, the sense in which we understand all Christians to be brethren of Christ.

Other bonds there are between Christ

The Sacrament of Friendship

and man, but none so glorious in its immediate origin as this. Baptism, the first source of union between our Lord and ourselves, is, of course, more important, because fundamental and absolutely indispensable. But to establish this union, to put into place the relationship that springs from Baptism, Christ did not deem it necessary to come in Person into our souls and thus prepare them for entering upon this essential union.

And when the bond established in Baptism is broken by mortal sin, He entrusts to a human agent the task of applying His power to restore the union. So, too, in the formation of that sacred relationship established between man and God when Holy Orders is conferred, the Great High Priest still acts through others, and confers the special sign and graces without Himself Personally entering into the soul of the one who is being ordained. It is only in the establishment of the union resulting

Union of our Lord

from Holy Communion that this great miracle of love takes place. We can judge, then, of the importance and perfection of this latter union by the exceptional and astounding method Christ uses to establish it.

We can form a judgment also from the wonderful ways in which the existence of this union benefits us. Our Lord is always keenly observant of man's needs, and quick to satisfy them. But there must be some kind of a request for help made to Him. One who is united to our Lord by the Blessed Sacrament basks in the sunshine of God's presence, which lights up the soul so that its needs are unusually visible. A strong love for God prompts the one thus enlightened to beg for help in proportion as his needs are impressed upon him. He knows himself better, and asks for help oftener and more fervently than he would if he did not enjoy the blessings of this union.

The Sacrament of Friendship

God's Son walks by his side, as it were, like a loving elder brother; watches for the least sign of fatigue or listlessness on the part of His companion; listens for the faintest appeal for assistance; and gives quickly and generously from His infinite resources the help that is needed. Is prudence lacking in the conduct of His favored brother and companion? At once and lavishly does Jesus bestow upon him a share of His own virtue of prudence. Do we falter, in fear of the struggle before us? At once our Lord strengthens our wills with a courage that is like His own because it comes from Himself. And whatever modification all this help undergoes is the result of our own failure to absorb and use it in all its perfection.

And so it is with all the virtues. They are given as they are needed. The infinite Life of our Lord is constantly at our service, constantly ready to yield us all the special gifts we ask for and really need. Is

Union of our Lord

it any wonder, then, that on the souls of those who are nourished by the Body and Blood of Jesus, there should appear, line after line, standing out more and more clearly and completely, the lineaments of our Saviour?

We are not surprised that such a change results in our souls, more or less rapidly in proportion to our degree of cooperation, when we consider that the fulness of the Life of Christ is at our disposal; that our Blessed Redeemer, in all His beauty and power and love is bound to us by so strong and close a tie that He is ours and we are His. As the full force of this great truth dawns upon us, we begin to realize more clearly the meaning of St. Paul's words: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me."

Thus it is that body and soul are perfected unto the everlasting possession of the fulness of Life. Acts of love that may be more or less infrequent at first, grow

The Sacrament of Friendship

in number and fervor. Sometimes, perhaps, a fleeting sense of this strong bond of charity that binds us to Jesus overwhelms all the other influences that affect our lives, and we become for the moment quiescent in the blissful taste of celestial happiness. Heaven that lies about us, since Christ is with us, seems to break through the barrier of the present life, and we glimpse the transcendent glory of the Hidden God. But this is momentary, and only adds to our anxious longing for unending rest with our Saviour, only adds to the ardor and frequency of our prayer:

Jesu, who now art hidden from my sight,
Grant what I so dearly do desire:
That contemplating Thee, Thy face unveiled,
My bliss may be Thy glory to behold.

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